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WHAT'S HALF AN UNWELL CEPHALOPOD?

Adventures in Science Fiction

#3

Bats vs Dredd
One's great,
one's awful...

SFX

MONKEY MEN:
BUILDING BELIEVABLE
APES FOR CONGO

THE LAST, BEST HOPE?
J MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI
TALKS BABYLON 5

REINVENTING BATMAN

HARRY, THE
GALACTIC HERO:
THE TRUE STORY
OF HARRY HARRISON

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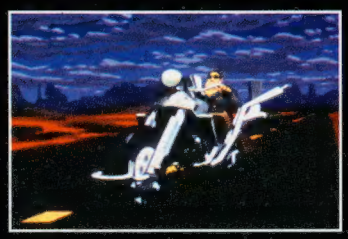

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Inside

SFX #3 AUGUST

Adventures in Science Fiction

NEWS

6 Strange Tales
If it's happening in science fiction, it's happening in Strange Tales...

FEATURES

20 Batman Forever
Behind the scenes of what we humbly suggest is the greatest comic book movie ever. By **Matt Bielby** and **Dave Golder**

28 Congo
Creating believable apes for the big screen, with *Congo* director Frank Marshall and ape expert Peter Elliott. By **Dave Golder**

38 The SFX Interview: J Michael Straczynski
As season two draws to a close, the creator of the ambitious *Babylon 5* drops hints of things to come... By **Liz Holliday** and others.

44 Babylon 5
Following the Straczynski interview, we present The Rough Guide to *Babylon 5*. By **Jim Swallow, Jane Killick** and **Steve Jarratt**

52 Harry Harrison
The creator of *The Stainless Steel Rat* talks to **MJ Simpson**

56 Alien War
Want to know what it's like being a Colonial Marine? **Chris Hulme** did...

60 Ed Bishop
UFO's one-time Defender of the Earth, and British TV's favourite Yank, comes clean... By **MJ Simpson**

62 Couch Potato
Beer, pizza and a feast of Bat-vids. By **Jonathan Davies** and pals.

REVIEWS

72 Film *Batman Forever, Judge Dredd, Power Rangers* and more...
78 TV *Space: Above and Beyond, UFO* on Bravo, and others...
82 Video *Timecop, Interview with the Vampire* to rent, and more...
90 Books Colin Greenland's *Seasons of Plenty* leads the pack...
96 Toys & Models New fibre-optic lit Deep Space Nine...
98 New Media *Command & Conquer, FX Fighter* and more...
100 Comics The two Alan Moores, plus *Goddess, Hellblazer et al*...
102 Tosh *Judge Dredd* phonecards and other "stuff"...

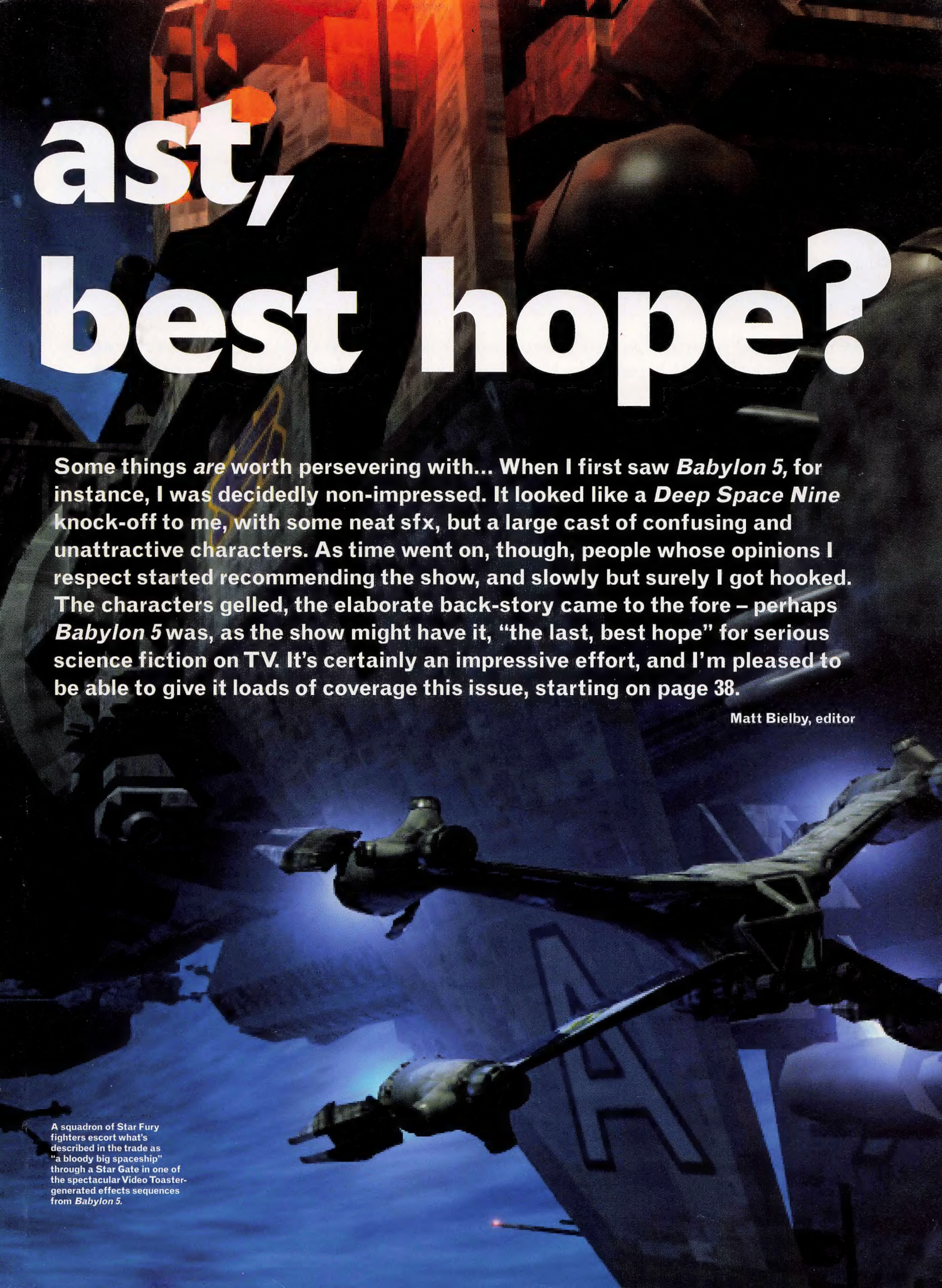
DEPARTMENTS

32 Neutral Zone Sci-fi or SF? That is the question...
35 David Langford So, did you guess the future?
37 John Grant *Cool World:* The case for the defence...
66 Yesterday's Heroes Barrel? Scraping? Us?
99 Subscribe! And get a great video for your troubles...
101 Next Month Mystic Meg, where are you now?
103 Competitions Win, er, Stephen King pillow cases!
104 Live! MJ Simpson reports from Sol III...

ast, best hope?

Some things *are* worth persevering with... When I first saw *Babylon 5,* for instance, I was decidedly non-impressed. It looked like a *Deep Space Nine* knock-off to me, with some neat sfx, but a large cast of confusing and unattractive characters. As time went on, though, people whose opinions I respect started recommending the show, and slowly but surely I got hooked. The characters gelled, the elaborate back-story came to the fore – perhaps *Babylon 5* was, as the show might have it, "the last, best hope" for serious science fiction on TV. It's certainly an impressive effort, and I'm pleased to be able to give it loads of coverage this issue, starting on page 38.

Matt Bielby, editor



A squadron of Star Fury fighters escort what's described in the trade as "a bloody big spaceship" through a Star Gate in one of the spectacular Video Toaster-generated effects sequences from *Babylon 5.*

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THE LATEST NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD (AND BEYOND...), GOSSIP FROM THE SCI-FI/FANTASY MOVIE INDUSTRY, SURVIVORS OF PRODUCTION HELL, ANOTHER PRECIOUS OBJETS D'ARSE, AND LOADS MORE...

This month in Strange Tales...

SMOOTH!

SFX explains the ever-changing face and cast of the *Power Rangers* on **page 8.**

HAIRY!

James Herbert reveals how his *Fluke* has been brought to film on **page 9.**

HAIRIER!

The best – and the worst – artificial monkeys in moviedom... See **page 10.**

BRAINY

Nepotism ahoy! Wes Craven's *fils* tells SFX about his latest project on **page 14.**

SFX Top Tens

SFX's guide to the best SF comic stories...

10. **Give Me Liberty** (Frank Miller & Dave Gibbons)
9. **Ronin** (Frank Miller)
8. **V for Vendetta** (Alan Moore & David Lloyd)
7. **America** (John Wagner & Colin McNeil)
6. **Miracleman** (Alan Moore, Alan Davis & others)
5. **Daredevil: Born Again** (Frank Miller & David Mazzuchelli)
4. **Batman: Year One** (Frank Miller & David Mazzuchelli)
3. **Elektra: Assassin** (Frank Miller & Bill Sienkiewicz)
2. **Watchmen** (Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons)
1. **The Dark Knight Returns** (Frank Miller)

The truth is out

Some episodes of *The X-Files* are based almost word-for-word on "real life" cases of UFO landings and the supernatural, as **Paul Cornell** discovers...

Scully searches for that subscriptions form for *The Fortean Times*, while Mulder follows up the story about blood-sucking alien neck huggers he read about in the last issue...

Early in his research for *The X-Files*, producer Chris Carter attended UFO ExpoWest, a Los Angeles UFOlogy convention, in an effort to root the series in "real life" experiences. He obviously learned a thing or two while he was there, for in some episodes of *The X-Files* it's quite obvious where he's cribbing his information from...

The pilot

Several of UFO expert and regression therapist Budd Hopkins' patients report nasal implants, and these have since become an established part of UFO folklore, duly getting a mention in *The X-Files'* pilot episode. The "missing time" which Mulder and Scully suffer in this episode (and in "Deep Throat," "E.B.E" and "Little Green Men" – see below) is also a familiar feature of the UFO experience, ever since Barney and Betty Hill published their book, *The Interrupted Journey*, in which they describe an abduction remembered days after the event.

Generally, the missing time is regarded as having been spent aboard an alien craft, a connection *The X-Files* seems to deliberately miss. After all, nobody wanted to give Mulder an excuse to become even *more* paranoid this early on!

"Deep Throat"

The alien goings-on at a USAF base echo the claims of Robert Lazar, who says that he worked on downed UFOs with the USAF. The night-time aerobatics are similar to descriptions of strange goings-on given by witnesses near the infamous Area 51 site, near Groom Lake in Nevada. In fact, this whole episode seems to be based on an article in the October 1990 issue of *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, which concluded that the USAF was testing a new family of aircraft with, "exotic propulsion and aerodynamic schemes."

A connection is often made between such aircraft and the "Roswell incident," a supposed UFO crash in New Mexico in 1947. Speculation over this event has continued to such an extent that the USAF felt obliged to issue a new press

Scully stares vacantly into the middle distance – and instantly gets signed up for the cast of *Deep Space Nine.*

there, allegedly

release about it last year. Yes, they admitted, there *had* been a crash cover-up. However, it wasn't over a UFO, but an experimental surveillance balloon, now declassified.

"Squeeze"

Real-life, self-alleged abductees Barney and Betty Hill were kindly told by their abductors that they were from the star Reticula. If Mulder's quip in his episode is anything to go by, he still thinks this is where aliens come from.

"Jersey Devil"

Not a good bit of research, this. The Jersey Devil is reported to be a flying creature, resembling a pterodactyl, not a bunch of primitive humans, covered in soot.

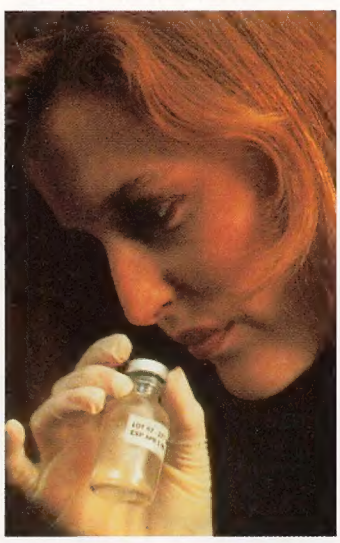
"Space"

It has long been rumoured that Mercury project astronauts like Walter Schirra encountered UFOs in space (codenamed "Santa Claus"). Rather unfortunate, then, that when Apollo 8 appeared from behind the moon on Christmas Day 1968, astronaut James Lovell announced: "There *is* a Santa Claus."

The "face" in the Cydonia region of Mars was photographed by the Viking Orbiter on 25 July 1976, and is thought to be yet another example of mankind's ability to see a face in anything. Mulder, typically, has his doubts about the failure of the Mars Orbiter mission, which was meant to take more shots of the red planet, but which mysteriously suffered a fuel leak in August 1993.

"Fallen Angel"

The military recovery force depicted in this episode, and the Blue Berets of "Little Green Men," call to mind the claims of Bill English, who was supposedly a member of a Special Forces team which entered Laos in 1970 to investigate a bomber downed by a UFO.



Scully in solvent abuse shocker! It all went downhill when Chris Carter ran out of modern American myths to plunder for *The X-Files* sometime around season 26...

"E.B.E"

The title of this episode is taken from the notorious Majestic 12 document, a supposed 1952 briefing for President Eisenhower on the remains and bodies taken from a crashed UFO. One "Dr Detlev Bronk" decides, in the document, that such creatures should be referred to as "Extraterrestrial Biological Entities." "Deep Throat's" execution of an alien echoes the purported fate of the aliens in this crash.

"The Erlenmeyer Flask"

Abductees such as Travis Walton (whose experiences in the film *Fire in the Sky* were altered to resemble the modern myth more closely) have reported seeing babies – or human/alien hybrids – on UFOs, just like the inhabitant of this flask.

Mulder casually writes off the authenticity of the Gulf Breeze photographs, a series of detailed, rather "too good to be true" shots of UFOs taken by Ed and Frances Walters of Gulf Breeze, Florida. He obviously finds the pictures pleasing enough to display on the walls of his office though!

"Little Green Men"

The abduction of Mulder's sister, when we see it, seems to owe more to Spielberg than modern UFO lore – the original description at the end of "Deep Throat" sounds more like the classic experience. South America – Puerto Rico, in particular – has recently become a hotbed of UFO activity. A pity, then, that this episode showed such a staggering lack of credibility. The SETI (Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence) project, for instance, has been cancelled at the Arecibo radio telescope, but presumably the office involved is still part of the bustling complex – not empty and stuck in the middle of the jungle as shown here!

"Duane Barry"

The abduction myth was solidified in the public consciousness by author Whitley Strieber, who, in 1987, published *Communion* – his account of being repeatedly abducted, and having his memory wiped, over a period of several years. The creatures involved were very similar to the small grey beings that appear in this episode. These are now the standard form of alien encountered by abductees. They're known as "the Greys" (poor Whitley doubtless regrets that you can't copyright "real" creatures). In Virgin's *Doctor Who New Adventures*, they're the T'Zin or Maleans, and in *Babylon 5* they're the Streebs. The image of a Grey's face, first prominent on the cover of *Communion,* has become so familiar an icon that the audience – and Mulder – soon get the idea from a quickly-sketched ovoid in "Little Green Men."

This just in...

A *Foundation* too far?

For everyone who thought Isaac Asimov's *Forward The Foundation* was the end to the greatest SF saga of all time, think again. The original trilogy – *Foundation, Foundation and Empire,* and *Second Foundation* – was actually a three-volume collection of short stories and novelettes published in the early '50s. In 1982, Asimov wrote *Foundation's Edge* which, against all expectations, was actually quite good. Not only did this neatly wrap up the *Foundation* saga, it also very cleverly linked together Asimov's entire canon of work – including all his robot stories. But then, of course, he had to go and spoil it all with the dire *Foundation and Earth. Prelude to Foundation* and *Forward the Foundation* followed, the latter being completed in long-hand mere days before his death in 1993.

However, as L Ron "Old Mother" Hubbard has shown, death need be no hindrance to a successful writing career. Indeed, HarperCollins USA has decided that the *Foundation* universe is far too good a franchise to waste, and has already commissioned three new novels. First up is *Foundation's Fear* by Gregory Benford, which will be followed by *Foundation and Chaos* from Greg Bear. SFX has no details yet on the third volume's title or author, but surely Greg Egan must be in with a chance...

While it's laudable that these sequels are being penned by competent writers, and won't be credited to the series' late creator, we can't help fearing that this all might be a *Foundation* or two too many...

Blade Runner 2 update

As a follow-up to last issue's story on *Blade Runner 2,* we can confirm that KW Jeter is writing *Blade Runner 2: The Edge Of Human* – but it will be a novel, not a screenplay. Confusingly, it's being touted as a sequel to both the film and the original source book, Philip K Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* How Jeter intends to square the differences between novel, original film and the Director's Cut remains to be seen, as does the question of how Ridley Scott's ideas for a second flick will relate to Jeter's books (rumour being that he is, in fact, contracted to write two sequels). KW Jeter was a *protegé* of Phil Dick, and the book is being prepared under the supervision of the Dick estate, which bodes well.

New life

Having quit his stint doing British-accented baddie roles, John Lithgow is now appearing as an extra-terrestrial travelling to Earth in *Life As We Know It.* His mission is to discover if mankind is truly "worthy" – and is Lithgow's first alien role since his memorable red lectroid Lord John Whorfin in the cult classic *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the Eighth Dimension* (which has just been re-released on video). Sadly, the idea behind *Life As We...* seems all-too-familiar. Haven't we seen this sort of thing done to death before, in *Starman* and *Hard Time on Planet Earth?* Whatever, the show appears on ABC.

Meanwhile, over on CBS, *American Gothic* takes a leaf out of Stephen King's many books for the tale of a dark and grim small town where nasty supernatural things occur under the watchful eye of an evil Sheriff. Shades of *Twin Peaks* and *Eerie, Indiana.* Also on CBS is *Quantum Leap's* Scott Bakula, fresh from the role of PI Harry D'Amour in Clive Barker's horrorfest *Lord of Illusions,* who stars as another detective investigating "the strange and macabre" in a series called *Prowler.* Chris Carter, you've got a lot to answer for...

This just in...

Worf factor *DS9*

In an attempt to boost flagging ratings, *Deep Space Nine* producers have signed up Michael Dorn to recreate his role as Worf. The Klingon starfleet officer will turn up in *DS9's* fourth season opening story, "Way of the Warrior," which will be a two-hour special. Captain Sisko requests Worf's presence on the spacestation to act as a diplomatic liaison with the Klingons when peace between the Federation and the Klingon Empire is disturbed.

"I'm very happy to be back on the Paramount Lot," says Dorn. "It was my home from home for seven great years, and where I'm planning to spend the next three."

Ringworld riddle

Larry Niven bibliographers beware! When you get to writing about his sequel to *Ringworld* and *The Ringworld Engineers* you're going to get very confused indeed – it has, to say the least, a somewhat convoluted publishing history. Try this for size: The prologue to *The Ringworld Throne* first appeared under the title *The Map of Mount Saint Helens* in the programme book for this year's Philcon (a convention held in Philadelphia). Meanwhile, the first four chapters of said book are about to be published in an anthology of "female vampire" stories, edited by Barbara Hambly; and several other chapters, partially adapted into comic form, will appear in *Omni Comix*. The whole thing – together at last! – is provisionally due for a UK hardback publication by Orbit next Summer.

Old skull-chest is back

Marvel Comics has generally had an unhappy time with Hollywood, its top-selling comic characters (Spider-Man, The X-Men, etc.) failing to make an impression either on TV or at the movies, unlike DC's Batman and Superman. All this may be about to change, though, because US broadcasters are currently falling over each other in an unprecedented rush to buy up Marvel heroes and turn them into TV movies.

NBC has bought the TV rights to the unlovely vigilante *The Punisher,* for instance, and has a script prepared which will hopefully be closer to the comic than the 1989 Dolph Lundgren film (perhaps even retaining that distinctive skull-emblazoned costume). Meanwhile, CBS has optioned the original green goddess, *She-Hulk;* for a one-off tele-film (a pilot for a potential series was originally considered).

Not be be outdone, Fox will be instigating an annual Marvel TV movie next year with war-hero-cum-super-soldier *Nick Fury,* to be followed by teen X-Men *Generation X* and defected Soviet super-spy, *The Black Widow.*

Source-pots

Film adaptations of comic strips and old '60s TV series continue apace. Currently pencilled in as purple-suited superhero the Phantom, for instance, is Billy Zane *(Dead Calm, Demon Knight, Sniper).* This big-screen venture will be directed by Australian Simon Wincer, fresh from the elephantine manoeuvrings of Disney opus *Operation Dumbo Drop,* and produced by Robert Evans.

Also under Evans' wing is *The Saint,* which has apparently been re-offered to the swoonsomely handsome Ralph Fiennes (he of *Schindler's List* and *Quiz Show* fame) after Mel Gibson passed on the role. Meanwhile, Joanne Whalley-Kilmer is denying – perhaps a little *too* vehemently – that she has been approached to play Florence in *The Magic Roundabout Movie...*

Power Rangers: What's going on?

Green Ranger's gone. There's a new White Ranger. Red, Yellow and Black Rangers are all different people. The ratings are higher than ever. And now there's a film of the bloody thing just come out. There's got to be some sort of explanation for all this, wonders a a thoroughly bewildered **MJ Simpson**...

The original TV team (top) meets the new look Power Rangers of the film and latest TV episodes (middle and bottom) in both "helmets-off" and "action" poses.

The *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* – that bizarre mix of Japanese men-in-rubber-monster-suit battles and all-American teen soap opera – is, of course, incredibly popular on both sides of the Atlantic. One recent episode shown on GMTV, for example, was watched by over 1.5 *million* kids nationwide.

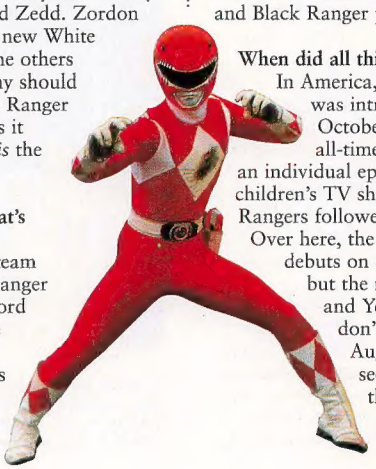
Recently, though, ratings have gone through the roof in America – where it's the most popular kids show of all time, thanks to the arrival of a new movie based on the show and various shenanigans involving swapping around the main characters. Do you want to know what's going on? Are you sure? Then simply follow our step-by-step guide...

What happened to the Green Ranger?
Green Ranger Tommy, originally given his powers by the badly-dubbed Rita Repulsa, was finally defeated by the new villain Lord Zedd. Zordon decided to create a new White Ranger, although the others thought that Tommy should have had his Green Ranger powers restored. As it turns out, Tommy *is* the White Ranger.

Costume aside, what's the difference?
Acting as the new team leader, the White Ranger has a White Tigerzord which can combine with four of the other Thunderzords to make the Mega Tigerzord. The White Tigerzord is controlled by the Saba, an enchanted white sabre. Tommy's power comes from the light of goodness. (Good grief.)

The White Ranger seems a bit cold and distant on TV...
This may be because the Japanese series from which the White Ranger's action sequences are lifted is *Dai Ranger* (1993), whereas the rest of the team are from a completely different show, *Zyu Ranger* (1992).

But that still doesn't explain why half the cast has suddenly changed?
The actors who played the original Red, Yellow and Black Rangers all decided to leave. So Jason, Trini and Zack were written out by being selected to attend a World Peace Conference in Switzerland. Three new characters were then introduced – Rocky, Aisha and Adam – and Zordon transferred the Red, Yellow and Black Ranger powers to them.



When did all this happen?
In America, the White Ranger was introduced last October, setting a new all-time ratings record for an individual episode of a children's TV show. The three new Rangers followed in November. Over here, the White Ranger debuts on GMTV on 24 July, but the new Red, Black and Yellow Rangers don't appear until 7 August. If you go to see the movie before then you might just be a little confused...

"If dogs could get Oscars...

...this one would." Or so says James Herbert about the canine star of *Fluke*, the new film based on perhaps the least bloody of all his horror novels. **Steve Holland** is suitably impressed.

With the lowest "horror" quotient of all the celebrated British gore-meister's books – involving, as it does, a dog who's convinced he was once a man – *Fluke* was always destined to become a major movie.

Certainly, the others that have been optioned in the past *(Shrine, The Magic Cottage* and *Haunted* among them) and the couple that have actually been made (the execrable *The Survivor* and *The Rats* – aka *Deadly Eyes*) were unlikely to attract the likes of Matthew Modine, Nancy Travis, Eric Stoltz or Ron Perlman, all of whom star in this latest outing.

I spoke to Herbert shortly after he'd returned from the Atlanta, Georgia shoot last year, where he enthused about the actors, the director Carlo Carlei and, in particular, the canine lead...

"We just did overnight shots in a graveyard," he grins, "and I was very impressed. Carlo Carlei bought the rights to *Fluke* eight or nine years ago, and suddenly in Hollywood he's become hot news. They said: 'Make whatever film you want.' And the one film he's been passionate to do all these years is *Fluke*. So I went over to the set, saw the dailies – and they were incredible. I was there while he shot some scenes in a graveyard and a car crash, and the actors are quite simply tremendous.

"They've got a real dog too. It's so obedient. It's actually a Red Setter, but they've darkened his fur up quite a bit. He's not a black dog, like in the book, but he's a lovely animal. If dogs could get Oscars, this one would."

James Herbert is obviously very pleased with the hard work the team has put in – and is keen to point out the vital contributions made by the sfx crew.

"Yeah, the animatronics... They're more real than the dog! The advances they've made are amazing. They put on a little show for me where they just put the dog's head on a flatboard, and three guys were operating their machines and its eyes were widening, its tongue was coming out, and if you touched it, it felt alive. Quite incredible! It really blew my mind."

James Herbert, best-selling British horror writer and godfather of gore, with our mock-up of the star of perhaps his "nicest" book, *Fluke* – a Red Setter painted black.

Happily, Herbert also has a good word to say about *Fluke's* more human co-stars.

"These are good, intelligent actors," he says. "We've got Matthew Modine, Eric Stoltz – my daughters are crazy about him. He'd just done *Pulp Fiction* with Tarantino, and on the set I said: 'What are you in it? A writer?' And he said: 'No, a drug dealer.' When you meet him he's just an ordinary guy, but once on screen he's magnetic – so dark. And the girl is Nancy Travis, whose last film was *The Vanishing* with Jeff Bridges and Kiefer Sutherland, and again her face is made for film. She's very pre-Raphaelite to look at, long blonde wavy hair, but magic on screen... The emotion in her face really shows. So I've come back very pleased."

MGM released *Fluke* in the USA on 2 June, but as yet there's no release date set for the UK. Still, if Jim Herbert's effusive praise proves founded, it should be well worth the wait. (And if it turns out to be a turkey, well, it'll just join Herbert's other film adaptations...).

This just in...

Magic carpets

The BBC is currently getting ready to film an eight-part adaptation of Clive Barker's *Weaveworld* novel. There's no news yet on a director (rumours that Joe Dante may be involved have been dismissed as wishful thinking), but effects maestro Bob Keen (who's worked on a number of Barker's movies) has been contacted about doing the creature effects.

It's worth a try...

Given that *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* is the most successful TV spin-off franchise since, oh, *The Herbs* (probably), it's not surprising that somebody has just appeared claiming to have invented it first.

This month's happy chancer is Herbert Simmons, a former FBI agent, who says that in the early '80s he conceived a series built around a group of clean-cut teens who transformed into colour-coded superheroes to fight alien bad guys.

Unfortunately for Mr Simmons, the Japanese "sentai rangers" TV genre dates back at least 21 years to 1974's *Himitsu Sentai Go-Rangers,* and there have been millions of similar series since, both live-action and animated. Anyone remember *Battle of the Planets?* The case, rather pathetically, continues...

Tomorrow never comes

Although *The Tomorrow People* has been cancelled (for shame), Tetra Films is now replacing it with *Delta Wave,* a series of two-part stories about a pair of child psychics and the professor who looks after them, and designed for a younger age group. There's good news, however, for fans of the original '70s series – SIG Video Gems will be releasing the show on video from September, starting with the very first adventure, "The Slaves Of Jedikiah."

Marvel no more

Many and complex are the ways of the publishing world. Marvel UK was, until recently, the purveyor of such well-known genre titles as the Clive Barker-fixated *Hellbreed,* and *Hammer Horror,* the UK's best-selling horror mag. But no more. In a sudden and unexpected move, the company's new managers (Italian sticker-meisters Panini) have ceased publishing all existing Marvel UK titles, with the exception of *Doctor Who Monthly.* This means that the company's two most recent titles – cult TV magazine *Playback* and off-beat film mag *Bizarre* – are effectively stillborn, after one "Collector's Special" apiece. The reasons for the closures are, apparently, that Panini plans to concentrate on kiddie comics for the under 12s.

New Benford

Gregory Benford wraps up his "Galactic Centre" cycle of novels in August with *Sailing Bright Eternity.* The hardback publication of this fourth volume ties in with the paperback edition of volume three, *Furious Gulf,* and reissues of the first two books in the saga, *Great Sky River* and *Tides of Light.* All are published by Gollancz.

Movers and shakers...

Christophe Gans, fresh from directing the live action version of popular Manga strip *Crying Freeman,* is currently bracing himself to remake *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea.* Meanwhile, Adam Rifkin has unexpectedly departed the directorial chair on comic book-turned-movie *Barb Wire.* Taking his place is music video man David Hogan.

Objets d'arse

Hub-cap like Area S4 UFO

What is it?
A model kit made by Testors, and based on the allegedly true observations of American scientist Bob Lazar, who claims that flying saucers have been seized, examined and back-engineered (i.e: disassembled to gain access to their technology) by the American military. It's nicely packaged, nicely made and not too expensive (at around £20).

Why's it cool?
Great conversation piece, and nicely detailed – the kit features a transparent hull, so you can spraypaint half of it and then leave the unpainted half as a window on the sparsely furnished interior, with its three seats, reactor and seated bug-eyed alien. A standing alien figure and a US guard figure are also included, together with a full colour booklet, and decals for what are (presumably) viewing ports on the upper collar. You also get an alien viewing "window," with hieroglyphics and a small American flag, supposedly applied to the hatch by the saucer's captors.

Why's it sad?
It's not really sad at all. We have our suspicions about Bob Lazar, on the other hand...

Verdict
The dopey thing about the area S4 UFO, of course, is that it looks just like the sort of thing a hoaxer *would* have made up back in the '50s. (In the '70s they'd have invented something covered in garbage *à la* The Millennium Falcon; today it would probably be all organic, like something HR Giger would come up with...)

Still, it's the ideal prop if you ever want to try your hand at a homemade remake of *Plan 9 from Outer Space*.... (Alternatively, get yourself some real hubcaps from the local dump – they'll do just as well.)

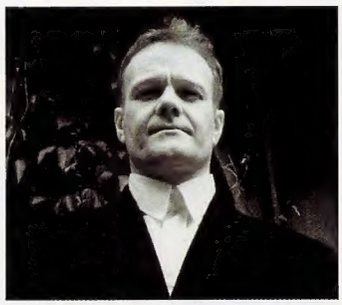
Mike Reccia and Matt Bielby

Grant 'n' Jeff's Shocking Future

Following *The Invisibles*, Scottish SF TV scores another first with what might just turn out to be the best hard SF show of them all, writes **Matt Bielby.**

The latest British SF TV project to poke its head above the surface sounds like it might be the most exciting – certainly, the most radical – of the lot. Tentatively titled "Future Shock" – a name certain to change before anything actually gets made – it'll initially consist of six 25-minute episodes, each one made up of three short stories of varying length, plus a framing sequence boasting, claims producer Kirk Ewing, a computer-generated presenter. "It's like a complex and more sleazy Max Headroom," explains Ewing. "Sex, drugs and rock-and-roll is definitely the order of the day."

Perhaps the most exciting news of all is that the initial "Future Shock" episodes are to be written by two SFX favourites – Grant Morrison, comic writer behind *The Invisibles* (currently being developed for possible BBC Scotland TV treatment), and hot SF author Jeff Noon. Each episode will combine live action with 3D rendered graphics – sometimes both in the same story – and mix elements of computer game and rave culture in something that, according to Ewing, will be "sort of like a Future Sound of London video, but with a plot." While most of the segments will be stand-alone short stories, often with twist-endings, some will link together to create a sort of "semi-serialised effect."



The man's everywhere! Jeff Noon joins Grant Morrison to pen "Future Shock."

While no backer has yet been found for the project – talks will take place with assorted TV companies at the upcoming Edinburgh TV Festival – six stories have already been written, aided by a European Script Fund grant. Ewing, who runs a tiny company called EVTV, and has a background in documentaries, says this is an idea he's been "working on for a very long time."

Also linked to the project is Björk video director Jan Kounen (whose last project was the Lynch-sounding *Vibo Boy*, "a short film about a guy who finds an ancient Aztec dildo and becomes an all-powerful dildo-wielding maniac"). Eventually, it's hoped other writers will be brought in to join Morrison and Noon – perhaps making the series a forum for interesting short story ideas written by new science fiction writers...

We will, of course, bring you more news on this project as we hear it. In the meantime, there may (just may) be something to see at this year's Glasgow Worldcon...

Gorilla movies: Which one's best?

In the month *Congo* receives its UK release, we look at the great ape movies of the past, and ask those all-important questions...

Name: *King Kong* (1933)	**Name:** *Mighty Joe Young* (1949)	**Name:** *Planet of the Apes* (1967)	**Name:** *King Kong Vs Godzilla* (1963)	**Name:** *Queen Kong* (1975)	**Name:** *King Kong* (1976)	**Name:** *Time of the Apes* (1987)	**Name:** *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988)	**Name:** *Congo* (1995)
Briefly: Giant ape falls (a) for blonde babe and (b) off Empire State Building. Ouch.	**Briefly:** Huge-but-cute ape escapes deportation by rescuing kids from fire.	**Briefly:** Astronauts return to Earth in the future to find mute humans ruled by intelligent apes.	**Briefly:** Giant ape fights giant dinosaur for no particular reason other than he wants a scrap.	**Briefly:** Distaff ape falls for "Ray Fay," played by Robin Askwith!	**Briefly:** Bloke in ill-fitting suit kidnaps Jessica Lange.	**Briefly:** Edited-together episodes from '70s *Ape Corps* TV show make no sense whatsoever.	**Briefly:** True story of a feisty naturalist living in harmony with gorillas.	**Briefly:** *King Solomon's Mines* meets *Magilla Gorilla.*
Quality of apes: Superb.	**Quality of apes:** Fine, but unmemorable.	**Quality of apes:** Clearly men-in-suits, but groundbreaking make-up.	**Quality of apes:** About as believable as *Godzilla.*	**Quality of apes:** Risible.	**Quality of apes:** Life-size animatronic Kong appears on screen for less than three minutes!	**Quality of apes:** Unlikely to win any Oscars.	**Quality of apes:** Pretty realistic.	**Quality of apes:** Not Stan Winston's best moment.
Verdict: Grade A.	**Verdict:** Good, clean family fun.	**Verdict:** Deservedly won Oscars, spawned four sequels and a TV series.	**Verdict:** Classic turkey.	**Verdict:** Confessions of a Giant Gorilla.	**Verdict:** Has to be seen to be believed.	**Verdict:** Thankfully obscure *Planet of the Apes* rip-off.	**Verdict:** Serious eco-movie.	**Verdict:** See review on page 76.
Most memorable for: The classic fight scene between Kong and pre-*Jurassic Park* Rex.	**Most memorable for:** Joe's nightclub act, in which he lifts a grand piano above his head.	**Most memorable for:** The Statue of Liberty at the end... Shock, horror! It's planet Earth!	**Most memorable for:** Monsters playing ball with enormous (fake) boulder.	**Most memorable for:** Nobody remembers this Anglo-Italian turkey, thank God.	**Most memorable for:** Jessica Lange saying: "Put me down, you male chauvinist ape!"	**Most memorable for:** Character called Genera Gay-Bar (at least, that's what it *sounds* like).	**Most memorable for:** Absence of David Attenborough and BBC Natural History Unit.	**Most memorable for:** Icky head-crushing scene in which the greys pummel Tim Curry.

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Killing time...

Three of comic books' *enfants terribles* are joining forces to produce *Skrull Kill Krew*, a new four-issue mini-series set in the heart of the Marvel Universe. **Steve Holland** spoke to Steve Yeowell, artist extraordinaire, whose previous credits include *Zenith* and *Judge Dredd* for *2000AD*...

The Skrull Kill Krew **– hip and, let's face it, very British – crash a history lesson.**

One of the biggest surprises in the world of comics this year has been the news that Grant Morrison, Mark Millar and Steve Yeowell have been collaborating on a series of – shock! – superhero titles for the world's mightiest comic publisher, Marvel. All three are established *2000AD* and DC/Vertigo writers, neatly packaged for critics and fans alike, which makes news of their planned work on mainstream Marvel superheroes all the more astonishing. I called Mark Millar to see if I could find out what was really going on when he hit me full-on with the news: "By the way, we're doing *Spider-Man*." So the rumours *are* true, then...

Before Grant and Mark take a pitch at the world's favourite web slinger, though, the trio are producing *Skrull Kill Krew*, a new superteam with a very old background, as Steve Yeowell recently revealed...

"Basically, I got involved because Grant and Mark had sent the proposal off to Marvel, which they liked, and they needed an artist," he says, laughing. "As we've been working together for so long we pretty much co-operate through osmosis; we almost don't need to tell each other what to do now, it's entirely instinctive. I think Grant and Mark just wanted to work with someone they felt comfortable with.

HEIDI?
JEEZ, LOOK AT HER EYES.
SHE'S ON ANOTHER PLANET.
ARE YOU OKAY, HEIDI?
OH MY GOD.
D'YOU WANT TO COME OUTSIDE AND GET SOME FRESH AIR?

And here's one of the guys they're after – a beer-swigging, friendly looking, Skrull.

"The problem with the comic industry is that you tend to get pigeon-holed very quickly, and people assume that you either can't or won't do anything other than the material you're known for.

"However, I've come to realise over the past few years that the comics you really like when you're in your early teens are the comics that you like subsequently; all the comics that remind you of what it was like reading comics when you were young. Well, we all love superheroes, and I think – purely and simply – we just wanted to do a superhero comic."

So who are the Skrulls?

"The Skrulls are an alien race that first appeared in issue three of *The Fantastic Four*, I believe, or it might have been issue two. They're a race of evil shape-changers bent on occupying the universe."

The problem is, those early Skrulls were turned into cows, weren't they? Not much of a menace there...

"Yeah, that was Reed Richards' solution to the Skrull menace, wasn't it? He hypnotised them; he made them change into cows and actually forget they were Skrulls at all, at least until they were revived by a Skrull ultra-beam in the early '90s in order to take part in the Kree/Skrull War. That was a big fight between the Skrulls and another race hell-bent on occupying the universe."

So what's a Skrull Kill Krew?

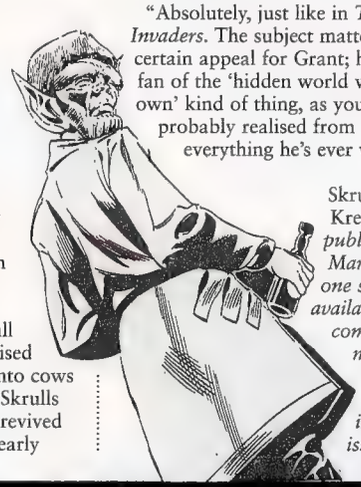
"The Skrull Kill Krew themselves are a group of teenagers who've been infected with a virus similar to BSC, something they've contracted through eating hamburgers made from the Skrull cows after their recapture following the Kree/Skrull War.

"The Bureau of Alien Activities, I think they were called, made the Skrulls change back into cows, and they've since been tried and executed. Basically, I can't believe Marvel are letting us get away with all this – the hamburger meat that was made from Skrull cows was infected with Skrull DNA, which had side-effects as a virus on humans of a specific tender age who ate it.

"Because they've been infected with Skrull DNA, they do have a kind of residual Skrull memory that they picked up from the DNA, which gives them special Skrull powers, Skrull memories and the ability to recognise disguised Skrulls."

So you're saying Skrulls have infiltrated all levels of human society?

"Absolutely, just like in *The Invaders*. The subject matter had a certain appeal for Grant; he's a big fan of the 'hidden world within our own' kind of thing, as you've probably realised from everything he's ever written."



Skrull Kill Krew is published by Marvel. Issue one should be available from comic shops now, and will be reviewed in the next issue.

PRODUCTION HELL

(Notorious for running the hot scoops on all the new movies first)

Edited by **Steve Holland**

You don't need us to tell you that films are notorious for cast and plot juggling during production and development, so this can only ever be a rough guide to current Hollywoodesque goings-on.

For more info, check the SFX Website at

http://www.futurenet.co.uk

Key: Dir – Director; Scr – Scriptwriter; ExPrd – Executive Producer; Prd – Producer; St – Starring.

AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN PARIS (J&M Entertainment/TriStar) Dir Anthony Waller. Sequel to John Landis' classic 1981 horror comedy, *An American Werewolf in London*, originally in development at Propaganda Films with Marco Brambilla helming, but put into turnaround when Brambilla split to direct *Critical*. London based J&M will co-finance with TriStar and share distribution.

THE AVENGERS Dir Nicholas Meyer. Scr Don Macpherson. Prd Jerry Weinbraub. Revamp of the TV series. The February 1995 shoot was delayed, but in May came the announcement that *Star Trek 2* and *6*'s Meyer will be in the director's chair.

Sadly, Diana's probably a bit old for the remake of *The Avengers* now...

THE CITADELS (Steve Walsh/Telescene Communications) Dir Stefan Schwartz. Scr Richard Holmes, Stefan Schwartz, Don Trukey. Prd Steve Walsh, Jamie Brown, Richard Holmes. Set in a polluted future, where humanity lives underground, the story follows four youngsters who plan to escape. $10 million budget.

CRASHDOWN (Daylight Prods.) Scr Craig Randelman & Michael Berlly. Prd Charles Gordon. Big-budget action thriller about the recovery of a crashed UFO. The two writers previously sold specs *Soft Kill* and *Coup d'Etat*, and pitched their latest script at 18 meetings in three days. Universal signed the dotted line on 8 June.

THE CROW: CITY OF ANGELS Dir Tim Pope. Scr David S. Goyer. Prd Ed Pressman. Currently in development for an Autumn start. Brandon Lee's replacement is French actor Vincent Perez, who starred in *La Reine Margot* and is currently filming *The Horseman on the Roof*. The film is budgeted at $25 million and has an early 1996 release pencilled in.

DARK ANGELS 2 The rights to do a sequel to the 1990 movie (aka *I Come in Peace*) starring Dolph Lundgren as a futuristic cop and his FBI partner Brian Benben have just been acquired by Matthias Hues.

DOOM (Universal) Scr Dean *(Jason Goes to Hell)* Lorey. Prd

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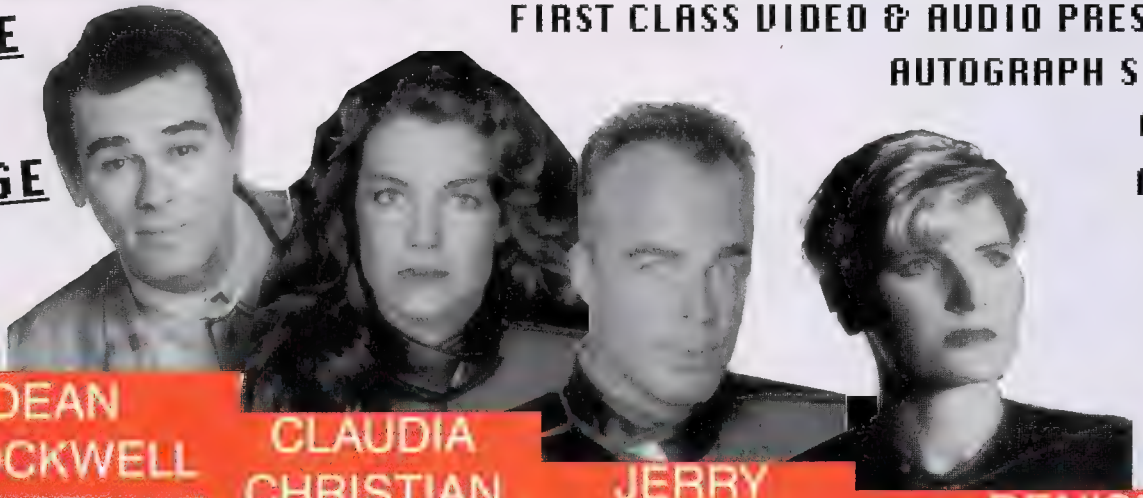

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Like father, like son

Wes Craven's Mindripper wasn't written, directed or produced by the great man himself, but by his son, Jonathan. **Dave Golder** asks what's going on...

It's not what you know, it's who you know. And when that who you know is your dad – and you can get his name ahead of the title of your first film – who cares if it's nepotism? Certainly not Jonathan Craven, producer and co-scriptwriter of the low-budget shocker *Wes Craven's Mindripper*.

So, Jonathan, did your dad have anything to do with the film?

"Sure. He was very much involved in terms of story," says Craven Jnr. "He read the script and had a lot of input, but he was in production on two other films when we made the movie, so he was really more a sort of godfather and advisor."

I'd imagine having Wes as your dad must have been a massive help in getting the project off the ground in the first place, though?

"Well, *Mindripper* was obviously offered me because of the name," Craven admits. "I'd been working on a TV show I'd co-created with my dad called *Nightmare Cafe* when Peter Locke from the Kushner-Locke company, which backed *Mindripper*, asked me to work on another episode of *The Hills Have Eyes*."

Of course. *The Hills Have Eyes* was one of Wes Craven's biggest hits as a director, and you can see the appeal of having the latest sequel produced by the son of the original helmsman. Somewhere along the way, though, the project metamorphosed into *Mindripper*. Why?

"Yeah, at the last minute we dropped *The Hills Have Eyes* title, and all those characters. The thing was, over the year and a half I'd been working on the script, it developed into three stories, and needed some streamlining. The *Hill* people just became redundant, so we cut all that stuff out."

Mindripper was always intended to be a cheapo gore-fest, set in the desert just a couple of hours drive from where Craven lives. Bizarrely, though, the film was actually shot in Bulgaria – partly because hiring crews there was cheaper, but mainly because it offered lots of great locations.

"We shot about two thirds of the movie in the basement of the cultural centre in Sofia," Jonathan explains. "They have a third level basement which is three stories underground, and full of corridors and airducts. It was exactly what we were looking for. We also spent a week shooting in a Bulgarian atomic packaging centre – though we needed someone running around with a Geiger counter the whole time!"

While Craven Jnr was involved in pre-production, by the time it came to filming, the project was very much out of his hands. He describes his role as a damage limitation exercise: "It was chaos. We had a Bulgarian crew, our director of photography was Spanish – you wouldn't believe the language problems. I ended up buying coffee and bananas for the crew!"

The things you do for art, eh? Even the low stuff...

Wes Craven's Mindripper *is reviewed on page 88.*

> "[Dad] was very much involved in terms of story... He read the script and had a lot of input, but he was really more a sort of advisor or godfather."

The film was so cheap, they couldn't afford anything like complicated prosthetics, so they opted for an actor with a weird-shaped head instead... Er, okay, so it wasn't *that* cheap.

Despite its low budget, *Mindripper's* a cut above your usual straight-to-video fodder.

Ivan Reitman. The story begins on Phobos and ends on Earth, with plenty of action and aliens in between.

EXIT ZERO (New Line) New Line paid a reported $1 million for the script by Kurt Wimmer which speculates what might happen if the Net achieves consciousness. Renny *(Die Hard 2, Cliffhanger)* Harlin, currently filming *Cutthroat Island* with wife Geena Davis, has been signed up to direct and produce through the couple's The Forge production company. Harlin is expected to begin filming early 1996.

THE FIFTH ELEMENT (Gaumont) Dir Luc *(Leon)* Besson. St Bruce Willis. Columbia picked up the American rights to the $65 million budget movie, originally entitled *Zaltman Bleros*, which will be shot in the USA in early 1996. Willis is said to be taking a small paycheck up front in favour of a lucrative back end deal.

***Doom*: Big guns, lots of shooting, and based on a computer game.**

GENE RODDENBERRY'S LOST UNIVERSE (Miramax) One of three properties announced as part of the deal struck between BIG Entertainment and Miramax's Dimension division (the others are Mickey Spillane's *Mike Danger* and *Neil Gaiman's Mr Hero*, qv). All three were created for BIG's Tekno Comix, launched in 1994.

GRIDIRON (Working Title) Rights to Philip Kerr's novel about a high-tech building which turns on its creator and occupants have been acquired for $1 million. Terry *(Mad Max 2 & 3)* Hayes has been signed up to write the script, his third big title in a row following *The Saint* and *Return of the Apes*.

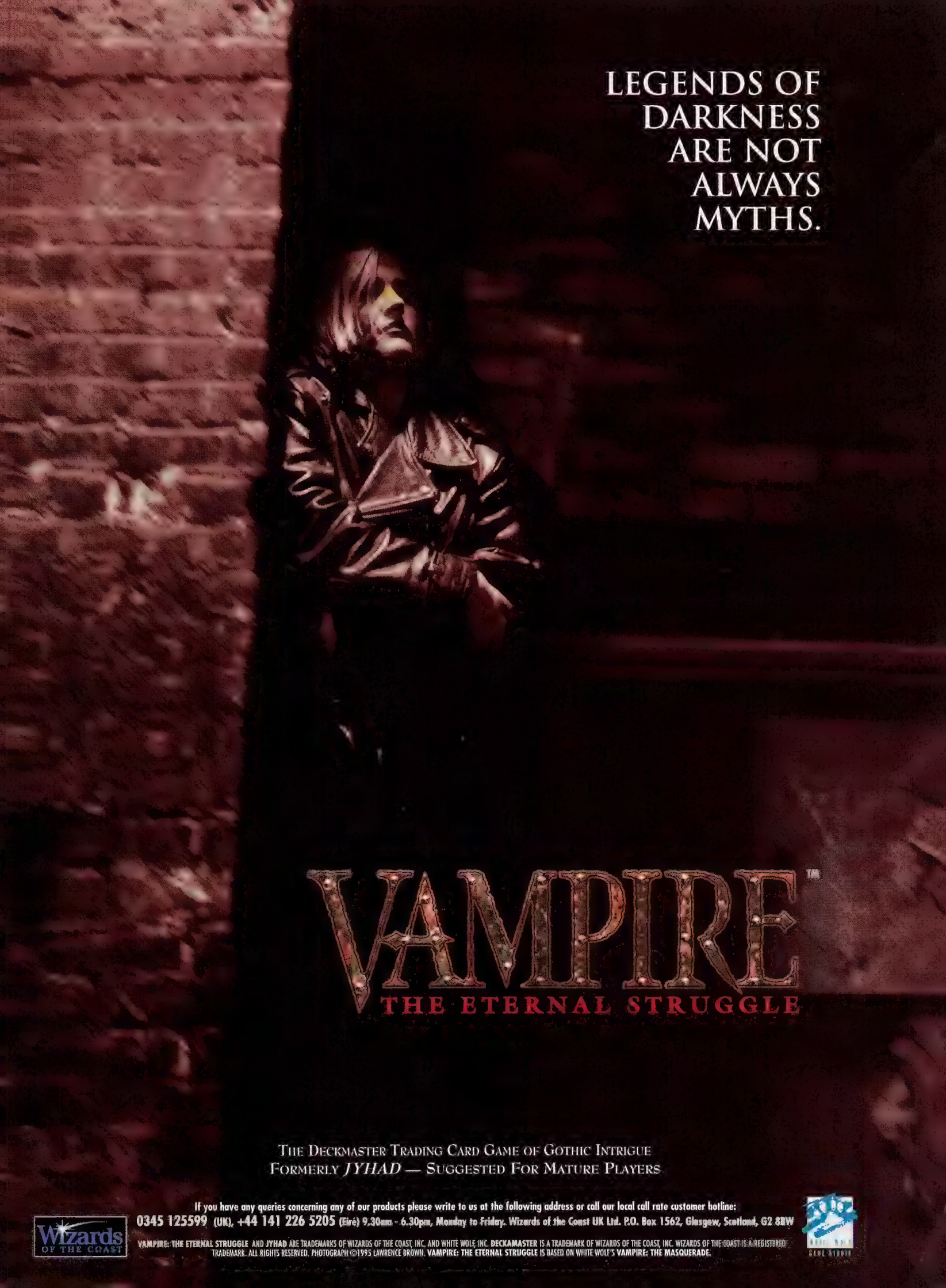
HABITAT Dir Rene Daalder. St Balthazar Getty, Tcheky Karyo, Alice Krige, Laura Harris, Kenneth Welsh. Shooting in Montreal, the habitat of the title is the home of a scientist who has turned it into a living organism. First announced as *Ecophoria*.

INVASION EARTH (Ed Pressman). Dir Anthony Hickox. Scr Hickox & Pete Atkins. Currently in pre-production by Ed *(Judge Dredd)* Pressman, about a government experiment with insects that goes wrong.

JURASSIC WORLD Michael Crichton has completed writing the sequel to *Jurassic Park* – the title first announced as *Return to Jurassic Park* – which Spielberg will produce via DreamWorks. The novel is being rushed out and should hit the stands in October. Richard Attenborough has already signed up to reprise his role as John Hammond.

LIFE DURING WARTIME (LIFE) Dir Philip Noyce. Prd Gale Anne Hurd. Based on the 1987 psychic warfare novel by Lucius Shepard.

NANMARE (Metrodome) Scr John Brosnan. SF story from the



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Much of the technology and equipment developed by James Cameron for *The Abyss* is being dusted down for the extensive underwater sequences needed in *Sphere,* the next Michael Crichton opus to go before the cameras. With the tale of a vast, alien spaceship being discovered on the ocean floor, complex shots of its excavation and entry port have to be completed before the actors can get on dry land to work on the interior scenes, which will be realised using CGI...

Terry Gilliam's latest fantasy extravaganza, *Twelve Monkeys,* has just finished shooting, with Bruce Willis playing a time-travelling convict whose life will be spared if he can survive a trip into the past and help cure a killer virus...

Remember how Sigourney Weaver has agreed to play Ripley one more time for *Alien 4,* and how they're getting round the fact she was incinerated by cloning her remains? There's just one problem. The few bits of Ripley they *do* recover from the furnace comprise human *and* alien DNA... Hmmm...

We're but weeks from *Waterworld's* release, but the horror continues. SFX now knows of British computer technicians who, until recently, were frantically working in London to modify the carefully sculpted gills situated behind Kevin Costner's ears for much of the film. The reason? Well, some attribute it to one bright spark belatedly noticing that the gills look just like the female genitalia. Oh *dear*...

The new *Star Wars*

George Lucas' announcement that he'll be producing three new *Star Wars* movies tells us little we didn't already know, writes **MJ Simpson**...

George Lucas has, at last, formally announced that he will me making parts I-III of the *Star Wars* saga – the Clone Wars, as they're known – back-to-back over the next couple of years.

The schedule is as follows: 1996: Set-building, casting and initial effects work; 1997: Main filming; and 1998: *Star Wars* Part I hits the screen.

Or, at least, that's the plan. The problem is, Lucas has now merely confirmed what's been all but certain for some time. The one definite out of all this is that the first film will be from a screenplay by Frank Darabont, writer of *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* and *The Fly 2,* and director of *The Shawshank Redemption.*

In the meantime, there's the 20th anniversary of the US release of *Star Wars* (aka *Star Wars Part IV: A New Hope)* in February '97 to look forward to. To commemorate this, a digitally remastered version, spiced up with new sfx, will be released in the cinemas. The much-trumpeted "previously unseen footage" included in this version mainly consists of one four-minute sequence in which Han Solo meets Jabba the Hutt. When this was filmed back in 1976, Jabba was played by an actor over whom it was originally planned to matte a CSO-ed stop-motion creature.

Special effects have now progressed to the point where a gross, slithery Jabba added to the old stock would look believable, and George Lucas is therefore happy to show this sequence with the new effects inserted. It will, however, make very little difference plotwise, since Jabba's displeasure with Han is established during his discussion with Greedo in the Mos Eisley Cantina anyway.

Similarly remastered versions of *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* will follow at roughly six-monthly intervals. However, it remains to be seen how the UK releases will fit into this picture.

Who's that portly gentlemen? An unidentified British character actor stands in for the not-yet-matted-in Jabba the Hutt in the four-minute sequence that will hit our screens in 1997.

author of *Proteus* set on an island off the US coast, announced in June 1995.

NEIL GAIMAN'S MR HERO (Miramax) Part of a three-property deal between BIG Entertainment and Miramax's Dimension division. *Mr Hero* debuted in 1994 from Tekno Comix. Gaiman is the creator of *Sandman*.

PHENOMENON (Touchstone) Dir Jon *(While You Were Sleeping)* Turteltaub. Scr Gerald DiPego. Prd Barbara Boyle, Michael Taylor. St John Travolta. Fantasy in which small-town gump becomes a genius after being struck by lightning. Travolta reputedly signed for $8 million.

Mr Hero – a Victorian-style robot in "a world he never made."

and Tuteltaub signed after Mike *(Four Weddings)* Newell passed on the project.

PLANET OF THE APES (20th Century Fox). Scr Terry Hayes. Prd Oliver Stone, Don Murphy. St Arnold Schwarzenegger. Based on the film (starring Charlton Heston) of the novel by the late Pierre Boulle. Jeff Rovin sneak-previewed the script in *Science Fiction Chronicle* and revealed it to have Arnie as a geneticist who travels back in time to save humanity from extinction in an ape-run society. "Instead of philosophy, the new film emphasises combat and sophisticated monkey suits," says Rovin, and we can only echo his assessment that it's the movie that Arnie needs rather than the one we'd rather see made.

PROPHET (TriStar) TriStar recently picked up the rights to Rob Liefeld's time-travelling hero and is looking for a major star to play the part. Liefeld says it's "the story of a man out of place and time who wakes up in a new world where he's a total stranger. He finds himself faced with the challenge of thwarting a doomsday military plot."

PROTEUS 2: THE PURSUIT (Metrodome/Victor Films) Even as the first movie moves into post-production, a sequel is already in the works, written by John Brosnan and starring – hurrah! – Craig Fairbrass.

ROCK CITY French artistic genius Moebius (Jean Giraud) has sold the rights to his comic strip to Hollywood's Blue Turtle Inc. Randy Lofficier provides the screen treatment. The strip has been collected in *Moebius 6: Pharagonesia* and will be reprinted in 1996 by Dark Horse.

ROOFWORLD (Samuelson Productions) Prd Marc Samuelson. Based on the novel by Christopher Fowler about gang warfare.

SCREAMERS Based on *Second Variety* by Philip K Dick and set to star Peter *(RoboCop)* Weller.

SPACE JAM (Warner/Northern Lights) Dir Joe Pytka. Prd Ivan

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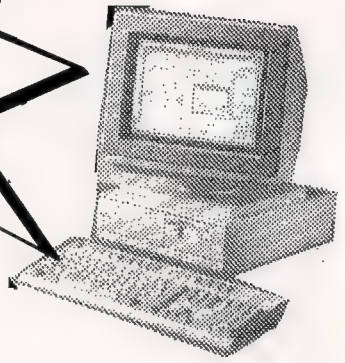

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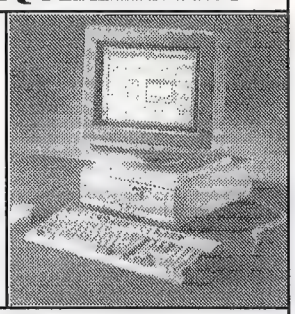

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So, who is ...
Philip K Dick?

Briefly: Prolific and hugely influential Californian writer best known for *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *We Can Remember it for You Wholesale*, the original stories for *Blade Runner* and *Total Recall*.

Is he any good? Well, he's desperately trendy, as his schizophrenic investigations of virtual reality (long before the term existed) make him the quintessential SF writer for the late 20th century. And, yes, he is rather good, too.

Major works: *The Man in the High Castle, The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, Ubik, Confessions of a Crap Artist, Flow my Tears, the Policeman Said, A Scanner Darkly, Valis.*

What's he like? Relentlessly unpredictable. Ideas and devices which would've sustained lesser careers are chewed up and spat out in a mere chapter by this all-powerful imagination. His short stories run the gamut of SF concepts, and his novels veer from character to character, from action to comedy, madness to mundanity, with alarming energy.

Oh, and PKD was cursed by that most heinous of SF-author diseases – he always yearned to be taken seriously for his "mainstream" works (only one of which, the excellent *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, was published in his lifetime). But this did mean that he pushed his science fiction ever closer to the "mainstream," gradually dispensing with the spaceships and laser guns of his earlier work in favour of a series of more grittily recognisable, yet cunningly warped, realities.

Key themes: What do we mean by "real," and what does it mean to be "human"? There's a recurring theme of duality, too, and loads of drugs – they're the portals through which we travel to alternate realities.

Buzzwords: Substance D, Chew-Z, Can-D, Ubik, Perky Pat, VALIS (Vast Active Living Intelligence System), Nexus-6, kipple, Phildickian

Suggested reading: *Ubik* – it's one of his funniest and most accessible works.

Jon Smith

Dalekmania

In two highly successful '60s films, Peter Cushing played the forgotten Doctor Who. Now a new video's being released to celebrate them, as **MJ Simpson** discovers...

Although they're not part of the official *Who* canon, many people have a soft spot for the two Dalek films Gordon Flemyng made in the '60s: *Doctor Who and the Daleks* (1965) and *Daleks – Invasion Earth 2150AD* (1966), both starring Peter Cushing as a human time-traveller. Kevin Davies, director of *More than 30 Years in the TARDIS* and *The Making of the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, has recently completed a new documentary video about the films.

Dalekmania is released by Lumiere on 24 July, and features interviews with Roberta Tovey (who starred in both films), Barrie Ingham and Yvonne Antrobus (who played Thals in *DW&TD*), Jill Curzon (who was in *DIE2150AD*) and stuntman Eddie Powell. Also giving their opinions are *Who* experts Marcus Hearn and Gary Gillat, Dalek creator Terry Nation, and Julian Vince, who made some amateur Dalek movies in the '70s.

Unfortunately, no out-takes from the original movies exist, but to make up for it *Dalekmania* does include new sequences using reproductions of a movie-style Dalek and a Dalek flying saucer. Widescreen copies of the original films are due out on video from Warner Brothers next February; both clean new prints, and in the correct ratio. Unfortunately, only clips from the new print of the first film are used in *Dalekmania*. Expect a full review next issue.

It's weird, French...

...but good too! Doesn't give you much to go on, does it, but that's the best we could get out of **MJ Simpson** when we asked him to describe (without dribbling profusely) the much-awaited Cannes SF hit, *The City of Lost Children*.

Heading our way in September is the critically acclaimed SF movie which launched this year's Cannes Festival – and it's French!

The City of Lost Children (aka *La Cite Des Enfants Perdu*) has grossed the equivalent of over $1.8 million since it opened across the country in May, and has also been a big hit in Belgium. It's the second feature from the directorial team of Marc Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunet, previously responsible for the cult sex 'n' cannibalism hit *Delicatessen*, but here joined by fellow *Delicatessen*-ers producer Claudie *(Betty Blue)* Ossard, director of photography Darius Khondja, set designer Jean Rabasse and cast members Dominique *(Diva)* Pinon and Jean-Claude Dreyfus.

Daniel Emilfork, whose credits include Fellini's *Casanova* and Polanski's *Pirates*, stars as mad inventor Krank, with *Beauty and the Beast's* Ron Perlman as a strongman called One. Perlman, who has also appeared in *Sleepwalkers* and *The Name of the Rose*, is making something of a career in foreign language films, having starred in last year's highly acclaimed Mexican horror flick, *Cronos*.

Just like *Delicatessen*, *The City of Lost Children* is a stunning, Gilliam-esque fantasy which uses brilliant effects profusely, and looks like being potentially the most exciting SF film of the year. There'll be a full review, plus interviews with the film-makers, in the next issue of SFX.

Stars of the best French film for years (from the top): Dominique Pinon as one of six clones; Ron Perlman and newcomer Judith Vittet as One and Miette; and Daniel Emilfork as mad inventor Krank.

Reitman, Joe Jedjuck, Daniel Goldberg. Warner Bros has signed up basketball star Michael Jordan to co-star with many of their *Looney Tunes* characters in a live action/ animated children's adventure, helmed by commercials director Pytka.

SPEED RACER (Warner) A live-action version of the Japanese animated television show has been a rumour for some time. The film took a big step forward with the news that Johnny Depp could play the lead role and Nicholas Cage would co-star. When first mooted, Richard *(Superman)* Donner was to direct from a script by Johnathan F *(Pretty Woman, Under Siege)* Lawton. Later, Patrick Read *(Spaced Invaders)* Johnson was at the helm, but the latest is that Albert *(The Crow)* Proyas is in the director's chair. Patrick Johnsen had a stab at the script, but it was considered too dark. Now JJ Abrams is having his shot. Shuler-Donner are still the producers and a September start date is pencilled in.

SPHERE Michael Crichton has been a busy man. The December '94 released *Disclosure* bounced over the $80 million mark in the States, *Congo* is currently on release, Jan *(Speed)* de Bont is directing *Twister*, and he's just completed the sequel to *Jurassic Park*... What's more, he's just sold *Sphere* to Warner, who has Barry Levinson lined up to direct. It's an underwater adventure about the recovery of a mysterious alien sphere which contains a US spaceship from the future.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 4 (New Line) New Line has inked a deal with Surge Licensing to produce a fourth *Ninja Turtles – Hero Turtles* by the time it gets here – movie. Despite the distinctly cold critical reception for their third outing, it still took over $42 million in the States, making it a success in any movie terms other than in comparison to the first *Turtles* pic, which is still the highest grossing independent movie ever.

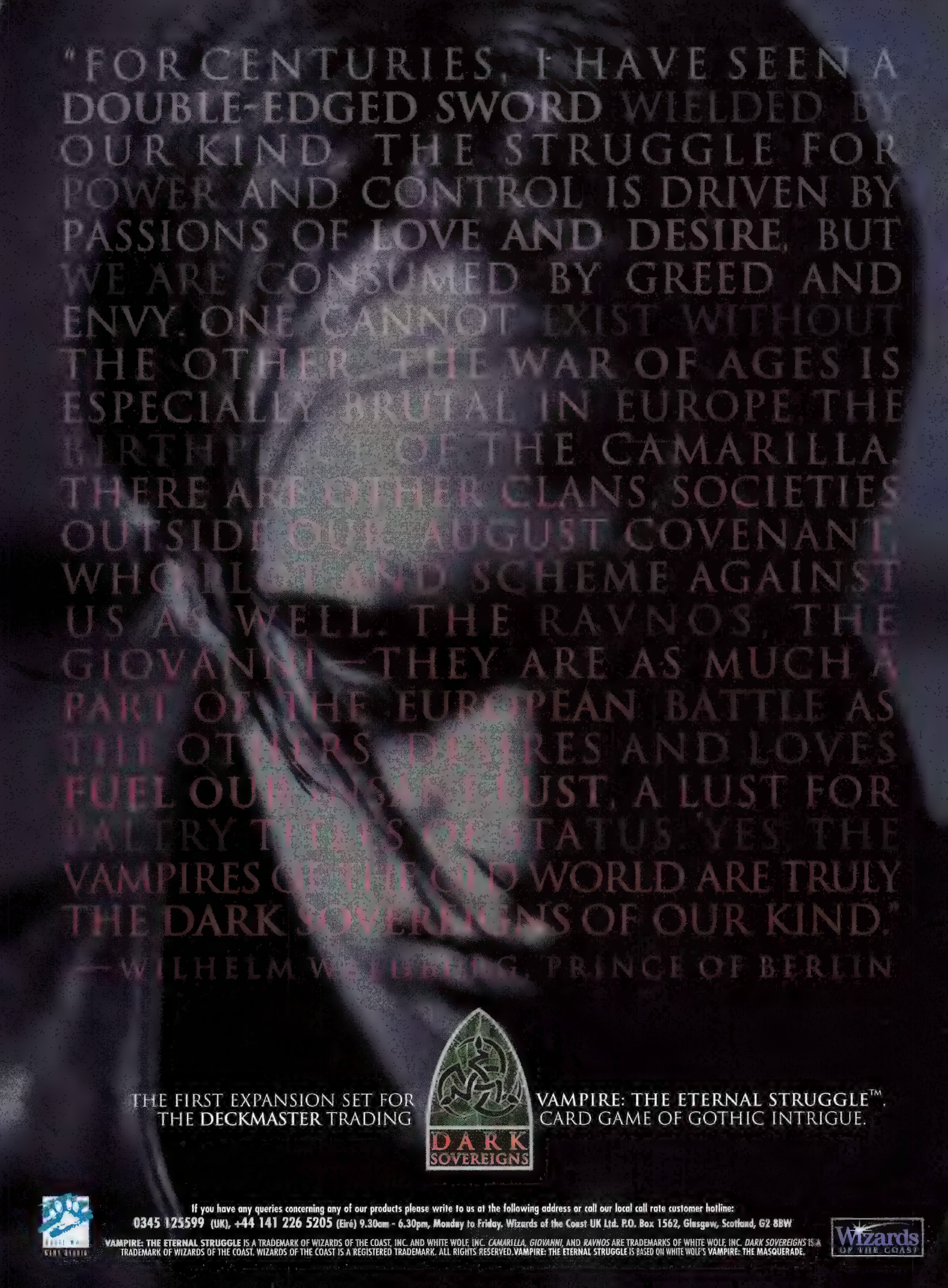
TITAN RUNNER (IAC Films) Announced by IAC and co-producer Chuck Fries in June, it's an SF actioner written by Dale Hildebrand.

THE TRIGGER EFFECT (Amblin Entertainment) Dir/Scr David *(Jurassic Park)* Koepp. Prd Michael Grillo. *The Trigger Effect* is about a family's struggle to survive after an electromagnetic pulse knocks out power and telephone lines, and causes society to break down. Should have begun shooting in July.

VIRTUAL HERO (Portman Productions/Ardisia Film/IOC) Dir William Shatner. Scr Keith Cavele. Prd Chris Brown. British-Japanese SF actioner in development with Captain Kirk at the helm, something of a risk considering his debut outing on *Star Trek 5: Kirk vs God*. This is due to beginning filming in early 1996.

VIRTUAL TERROR (The Film Company) Dir Ian Powell, Nigel Barton, Jonathan Glendening, Omid Nooshin. Scr Powell, Barton, Stephen Salter, Nooshin. ExPrd Ronald de Neet. Prd Elisar C. Kennedy, Damian Waters, Salter, Nooshin. St Kerry Norton, Daniel Jordan, Jonathan Coote, David Gilbrook. An anthology of three tales of paranoia and psychological terror related to a journalist by Balthazar, a half human/computer hybrid.

ZONE RUNNER (Live Entertainment). Dir/Scr/St Mario Van Peebles. Due to roll in '95/'96.


"FOR CENTURIES, I HAVE SEEN A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD WIELDED BY OUR KIND. THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER AND CONTROL IS DRIVEN BY PASSIONS OF LOVE AND DESIRE, BUT WE ARE CONSUMED BY GREED AND ENVY. ONE CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT THE OTHER. THE WAR OF AGES IS ESPECIALLY BRUTAL IN EUROPE. THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE CAMARILLA. THERE ARE OTHER CLANS, SOCIETIES OUTSIDE OUR AUGUST COVENANT, WHO PLOT AND SCHEME AGAINST US AS WELL. THE RAVNOS, THE GIOVANNI — THEY ARE AS MUCH A PART OF THE EUROPEAN BATTLE AS THE OTHERS. DESIRES AND LOVES FUEL OUR PASSION. LUST. A LUST FOR BEAUTY. TITLES. STATUS. YES, THE VAMPIRES OF THE OLD WORLD ARE TRULY THE DARK SOVEREIGNS OF OUR KIND."
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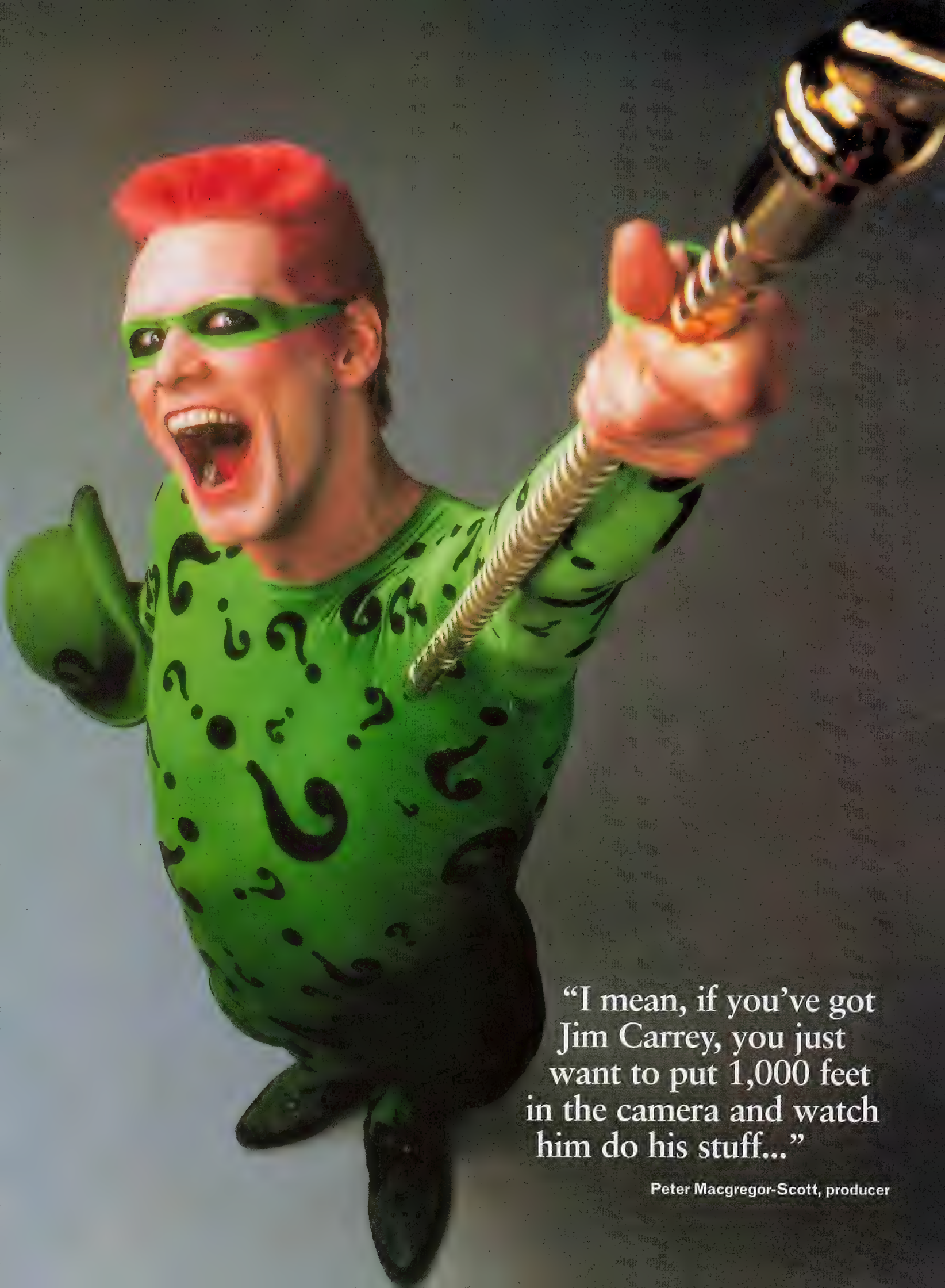


"I mean, if you've got Jim Carrey, you just want to put 1,000 feet in the camera and watch him do his stuff..."

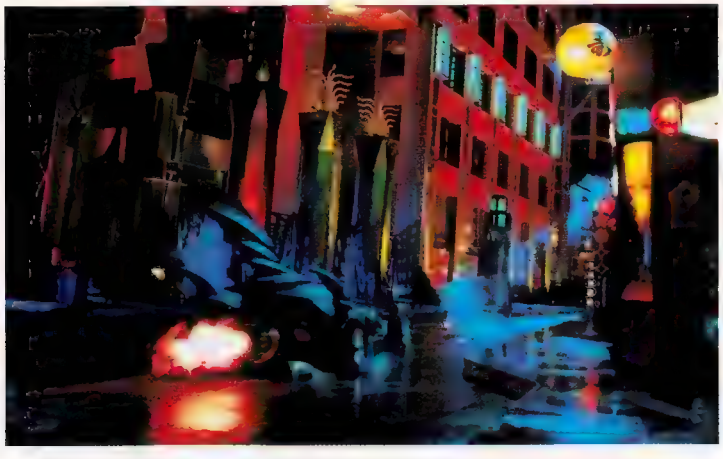
Peter Macgregor-Scott, producer

WAIT 'TIL THEY GET A LOAD OF THIS!

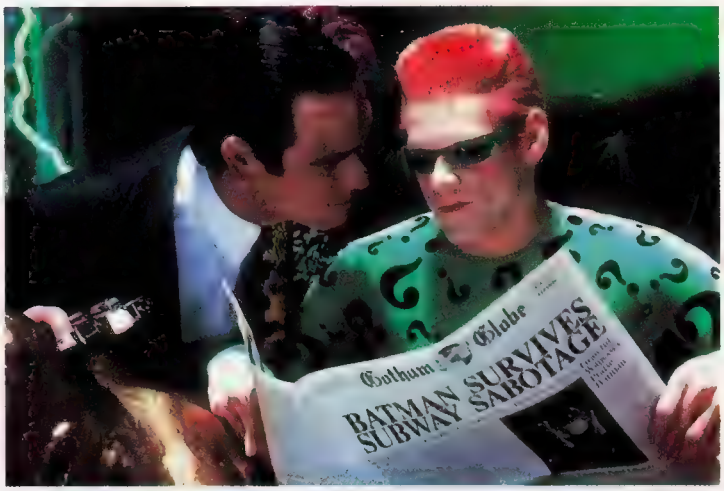
OF COURSE, BY NOW YOU PROBABLY HAVE. THE LATEST INCARNATION OF THE DARK KNIGHT RETAINS THE TRADEMARKED MOODINESS, BUT SPICES IT UP WITH BRIGHT LIGHTS, INCREDIBLE PRODUCTION DESIGN, AND SOME TOP PERFORMANCES. WE HATE TO GUSH, BUT IT'S SUPERB ENTERTAINMENT. TO SEE HOW IT WAS DONE, **MATT BIELBY** SPOKE TO BATMAN FOREVER'S PRODUCER, PETER MACGREGOR-SCOTT, AND **DAVE GOLDER** CHATTED TO PRODUCTION DESIGNER BARBARA LING. NEXT STOP, GOTHAM CITY!

That *Batman Forever* hasn't received universal critical praise seems to us at SFX to be one of the mysteries – nay, riddles – of the year. "Soulless," some call it, but we have to disagree. After all, doesn't it take us much further into the psychology of Bruce Wayne than any previous *Batman* film, with the possible exception of the animated *Mask of the Phantasm*? "Thinly plotted," they cry – and sorry, but we have to take exception here too. We get the origins of both Robin and The Riddler, a neat *Lois and Clark*-style love-triangle, The Riddler's master-plan to become the smartest man in Gotham City, *and* some understanding of what's going on behind Two-Face's warped visage to boot – surely enough plot for *two* movies?

But they don't stop there. "Hectic," "demented", "unrestrained" moan the nay-sayers – and for once we have to agree. Sure the film moves at an incredible pace – one American reviewer described it as "a two-hour movie that goes by in 14 seconds" – but isn't that a *good* thing? This is a superhero film we're talking about, after all...



The Batmobile powers through Gotham – not a set but New York City, redressed for the film. "Taking things to the streets is the only way I work," says producer Peter Macgregor-Scott.



some kind of credit

If Michael Keaton got blown off the screen by Jack Nicholson, what chance does Val Kilmer have against two of the biggest scene-stealers around? Actually, you'd be surprised...

Still, at least everyone seems to agree about one thing – *Batman Forever* looks incredible. For the first time, we see Gotham City as it was meant to be seen – the use of real streets opens things up brilliantly, the incredible CGI and model work creating an amazing alternative New York, three times the height of the real thing, and covered in incredible art deco detail. New Bat-equipment, a great script, plus some scenery-chewing performances crank up the fun factor all the way.

But how has such success come about – particularly in the light of the film's moody, less satisfying predecessors? To find out, SFX spoke to Peter Macgregor-Scott – ex-patriot British producer of the new *Batman* – and the film's remarkable production designer, Barbara Ling. One thing's certain – this new movie has little to do with previous Bat-director Tim Burton, despite the producer's credit he takes on the film.

"We sent him the scripts as they came through, and kept him informed of casting decisions," says Macgregor-Scott, "but it was more as a matter of record than anything else. I only saw him once!"

"RIDDLE ME THIS, RIDDLE ME THAT, WHO'S AFRAID OF THE BIG BLACK BAT?"

WHO INDEED? CERTAINLY NOT BAT-PRODUCER PETER MACGREGOR-SCOTT, WHO – WITH DIRECTOR JOEL SCHUMACHER – WAS ASKED TO REINVENT WARNER'S MOST SUCCESSFUL FILM FRANCHISE. "AND A BLOODY GOOD JOB THEY DID TOO," MUTTERS AN IMPRESSED **MATT BIELBY**, "MUCH AS I HATE TO ADMIT IT..."

Val Kilmer *is* the new-look Batman, a more convincing superhero than the bravely-playing-against-type Keaton. "He was the only guy we considered," claims Macgregor-Scott.

"Warner very much wanted a new Batman," says Peter Macgregor-Scott, British producer of such films as Steve Seagal's *Under Siege* and *The Fugitive*, and one of the guiding lights behind the new *Batman*. "They'd made two with Tim Burton, but there was concern that the second, in particular, was too dark. There'd been a certain backlash against that way of doing things, so the plan was to maintain the integrity of what had gone before, but make it much more fun."

And that's exactly what they've done. The new Bat-team have kept the best bits from the previous films, but added elements from all the other versions of the character too – the '60s TV show, the old Bob Kane comics, the animated series, even Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*. Val Kilmer makes a much more obvious Bats too...

"Yeah!" says Macgregor-Scott. "Michael Keaton had decided he didn't want to do the role any more, and as far as Joel Schumacher and myself were concerned, Val was the only guy to replace him – he has the perfect combination of being able to handle Bruce Wayne really well, and be phenomenal as Batman."

He seems much less screwed up than the Keaton Batman too...

"Well, Val Kilmer brought a certain sanity and intelligence to the thing that immediately made it different to the on-edge Keaton version. In our film, he's more of a slightly troubled guy than a genuinely disturbed one. And Val's a big fella – he's six foot one, six two, and around 200 pounds – so he really looks the part too."

Tim Burton didn't have much to do with the film at all, did he? It certainly doesn't feel like the sort of thing he'd have done...

"No, it probably isn't," Macgregor-Scott agrees. "The whole movie is designed to be much more accessible than the first two. It's brighter and brasher and much more action-packed. That said, I think Tim's quite happy with the end result."

It certainly looks a lot less studio-bound than most Tim Burton films. A decision was obviously made early on to take as much of the action as possible out into the real world. Why was that?

"Well, taking things onto the streets is really the only way I work," Macgregor-Scott explains. "My philosophy is, 'If you can't shoot it for real, shoot as much as you can, then fix in whatever's missing with miniatures, or digitally, or whatever.' New York gave us a great starting point – having the Batmobile go down Wall Street at 100 miles an hour can't be beat! – though we obviously brought in a lot of set-dressing, statues and so on, to make everything look more Gotham. I think, in the end, we spent eight days shooting in New York, and a few days doing other stuff on the streets of Los Angeles too."

What are the advantage of shooting "for real?" Presumably, you don't have as much control as you would have in the studio...

"No, but I think movies shot completely in a studio suffer from a certain claustrophobia. You just feel too closed in, which I think was a big problem with the second *Batman* film. When you're outside, you're actually in a real place, and there are all sorts of things going on around you. It makes a real difference."

WE TALK ABOUT THE CASTING FOR A WHILE – SOMETHING WE BOTH agree is one of the real strong points of the film, from the new Batman,

through the mega-star villains, right down to the character parts. Michael Gough as Bruce Wayne's faithful butler, Alfred, is particularly fine, for instance, and steals almost every scene. Not that he's the only one with cracking dialogue – *Batman Forever* seems carefully designed to make sure every significant character gets at least one or two really good moments...

"Yeah, we were *very* lucky with the casting" he laughs. "Jim Carrey was, of course, a godsend. Originally, Joel was keen to have Robin Williams play The Riddler, but Robin had just completed *Mrs Doubtfire,* and I think he was reluctant to do two huge comedic roles back to back. But anyway, in the end we decided Jim Carrey simply *was* the guy. With Robin this would have been a totally different movie..."

A lot of people have said they think Jim Carrey walks away with the film, just like Jack Nicholson did with the first one...

"Well, villains always get the juice. I mean, you're right – when you think of the first *Batman,* you think of Jack Nicholson saying, 'Where does he get those wonderful toys?', and I think it's the same with Jim Carrey. You can't really avoid it. That said, we did our best to balance things out by making sure Batman had the very best role he's had so far – and, of course, you're going to have to get up pretty early in the morning to out-act Tommy Lee Jones. At the end of the day, though, our solution was just to turn the cameras on and let it fly."

How did the decision to include Robin in the film come about? I mean, he's not the most popular character with all Bat-fans, and it'd be very easy for him to come across looking kind of stupid...

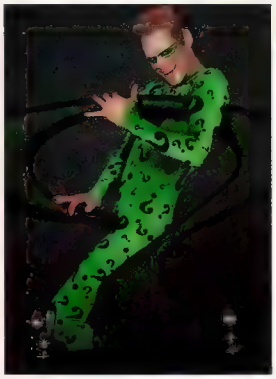
"You might not know this, but there was actually some talk about introducing Robin in the second film," whispers Macgregor-Scott, conspiratorially, "and I personally think they should have done it.

Certainly, Joel and I knew we wanted Robin

"New York gave us a great starting point – having the Batmobile go down Wall Street at 100 miles an hour can't be beat!"

Peter Macgregor-Scott, producer

"We wanted Robin from the beginning," enthuses Macgregor-Scott. "He's a great character, and it means you've got two villains and two heroes." Yeah, and his new costume is *great.*



All new villains (The Riddler, left, looking saucy), all new Bat-equipment (above) and a great new car (below). What more could you ask for?

Joel Schumacher – one-time hairdresser, *Lost Boys*, *Flatliners* and *Falling Down* director, and now, post-*Batman*, just about the hottest ticket in Hollywood. His design sense helped the movie no end, enabling production designer Barbara Ling to really run with her ideas.

right from the beginning. He's a great character, and it means you've got two villains and two heroes. And his costume is so cool too – in fact, the only thing Chris O'Donnell wanted to take home with him from the movie set was his Robin suit. He was desperate for it."

Chris O'Donnell does a little "Holy-something, Batman!" joke at one point – a reference to the '60s TV show – doesn't he? And there are all sorts of other little in-jokes there for fans to pick up on too...

"Oh, you liked that, did you? There's a reference to Metropolis in there as well, and another to Michele Pfeiffer's Catwoman – the idea was to provide a constant layering, where little tributes to earlier versions of *Batman* keep cropping up. There's even a bit of a *Lois and Clark* TV show-type interaction going on between Nicole Kidman's character, Batman and Bruce Wayne. In fact, Dean Cain from the TV show was going to come over to the set dressed as Superman for a day to meet Val in his Batman outfit, but it never happened. Would have been great, though, wouldn't it?"

TV and movie references you might have expected, but I was pleased to see there are lots of references to the comic books too.

"The only thing Chris O'Donnell wanted to take home with him from the set was his Robin suit. He was desperate for it!"

Peter Macgregor-Scott, producer

There's been plenty of talk about how the bright primary colours used in *Batman Forever* are meant to reflect the colours of the old comics. What I thought was more interesting, though, was that there are whole scenes directly lifted from landmark Batman issues...

"You're right," he says. "We had comics kicking around all the time. Bob Kane, the creator of Batman, is, of course, still around, and we looked at a lot of his stuff – we had storyboards with comic images on them made up for constant reference. And Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* was definitely a huge influence – the scene where the young Bruce Wayne falls into what becomes the Batcave, and sees a giant bat flying at him, was taken directly from *The Dark Knight.*"

KEEPING TABS ON A MASSIVE PRODUCTION LIKE BATMAN FOREVER must surely take it out of you – after all, Tim Burton was apparently burnt out on the character after two of them, and felt he didn't anything to offer a third. With the success of *Batman Forever,* a fourth film is inevitable, so the question has to be this: Do you guys feel like you've got another one in you?

"Oh yeah," he says, muttering something about if he'd known how much work *Batman Forever* was going to be, he might never have got involved in the first place. "We've all got one more inside us. After all, there are plenty of Batman baddies left, and it's a hell of a lot of fun making a *Batman* movie. You've got this huge sandpit, with all the toys in the world, and there are no limits to what you can do with them. I mean, you can say, 'Okay, let's do a car chase,' and when somebody says, 'How about if the car goes up the side of the building?' you can just go with it – provided you can afford it, of course..."

Batman's such an icon now – everyone knows who he is, which gives a film like this an obvious advantage over something like, say, *Judge Dredd.* But what do you think it is about Batman that keeps us coming back to him? Is it just that he's been around since 1939, and we're all so familiar with him?

"Well, partly – but mainly it's just that Batman's such a wonderful character. The guy is the ultimate hero. He's a human being who dresses up in a suit at night, and goes out to fight crime as a bat. It doesn't get much better than that! And he's intriguing – here's a guy who has millions and millions of dollars in his daytime world, yet he's still driven to fight crime at great personal risk. Why's he doing it? What drives him? It's just perfect."

THIS HAS BEEN A TRICKY INTERVIEW, TO BE HONEST. I KNOW I'VE BEEN gushing rather, but I saw the film the night before I spoke to Peter, and I loved it. Perhaps it's just relief that, in the wake of the disappointing *Congo* and *Judge Dredd*, here's a big, big Summer SF movie that's actually worth going to see. There are lots of great bits to the film – lots of things I really enjoyed – but what, I wondered, was most pleasing from the film-maker's point of view? What, for Peter Macgregor-Scott, really stands out?

"I think if I had to choose just one thing," he says, after some deliberation, "it'd have to be that the movie's quite seamless. We're mixing live photography with special effects all the time, but the film just sweeps you along so fast you don't have time to try and figure out 'How did they do that?'"

My favourite thing, for what it's worth, is the production design. I mean, the Batmobile looked good in the first couple of films, but here it's simply mindblowing...

"Yeah, well we originally made four or five models for different ways to go with the Batmobile, all about three feet long, and brought them together for Joel to look at. He was walking around them, and he said, 'Boys – we still don't have it.' So we basically threw everything out and started again..."

And the problem was?

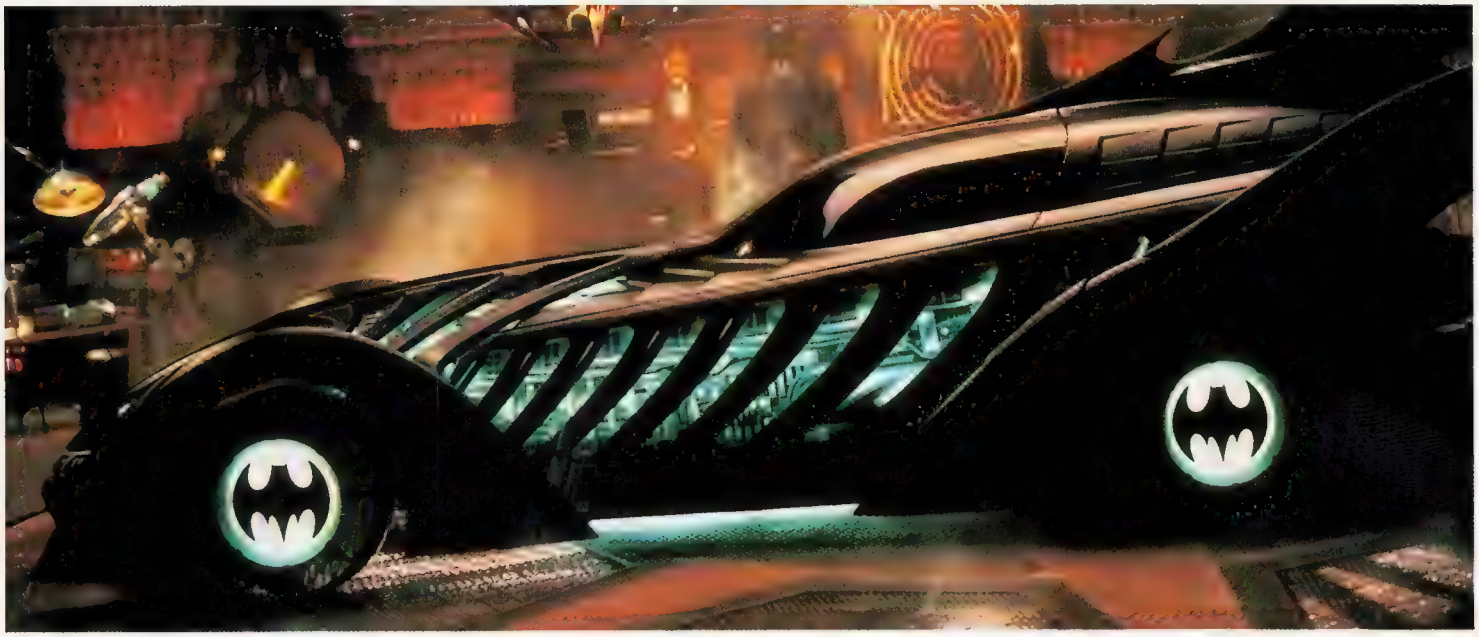
"They just weren't organic enough for Joel. The car we've ended up with has quite a unique design – it's like a body in some ways, with a rib cage, and through the gaps you can see the insides. It's kind of like something HR Giger would come up with."

That's just about all we've got room for. Is there anything else you'd like to say about *Batman Forever* before we go?

"Just that we were very lucky," he smiles, "We had the best people working on this at almost every level, and an amazing cast. I mean, if you've got Jim Carrey, you just want to put 1,000 feet in the camera and watch him do his stuff. But when you've got him and Tommy Lee Jones *together,* you just *know* the screen's going to be on fire."

"IT'S THE CAR, RIGHT? CHICKS LOVE THE CAR..."

AND, IF THEY'VE GOT ANY SENSE, THEY'LL LIKE THE REST OF IT TOO. GOTHAM CITY IS DEAD. LONG LIVE GOTHAM CITY. THE OLD, GLOOMY, RATHER THEATRICAL STOMPING GROUND OF TIM BURTON'S ACCLAIMED DARK KNIGHT HAS BEEN REPLACED BY A BIZARRE, KALEIDOSCOPIC FUSION OF ARCHITECTURAL STYLES, THOUSANDS OF FEET TALL, AND PACKED WITH MASSIVE STATUES. **DAVE GOLDER** WANTS TO HAVE PRODUCTION DESIGNER BARBARA LING'S BABIES...



Designer Ling was adamant the new Batmobile should have a fin to give it a Bat-profile.

"We wanted to design Batman's world first, so there was an overall sense of the Bat in the movie. Then we could move to the other stuff, like the gadgets..."

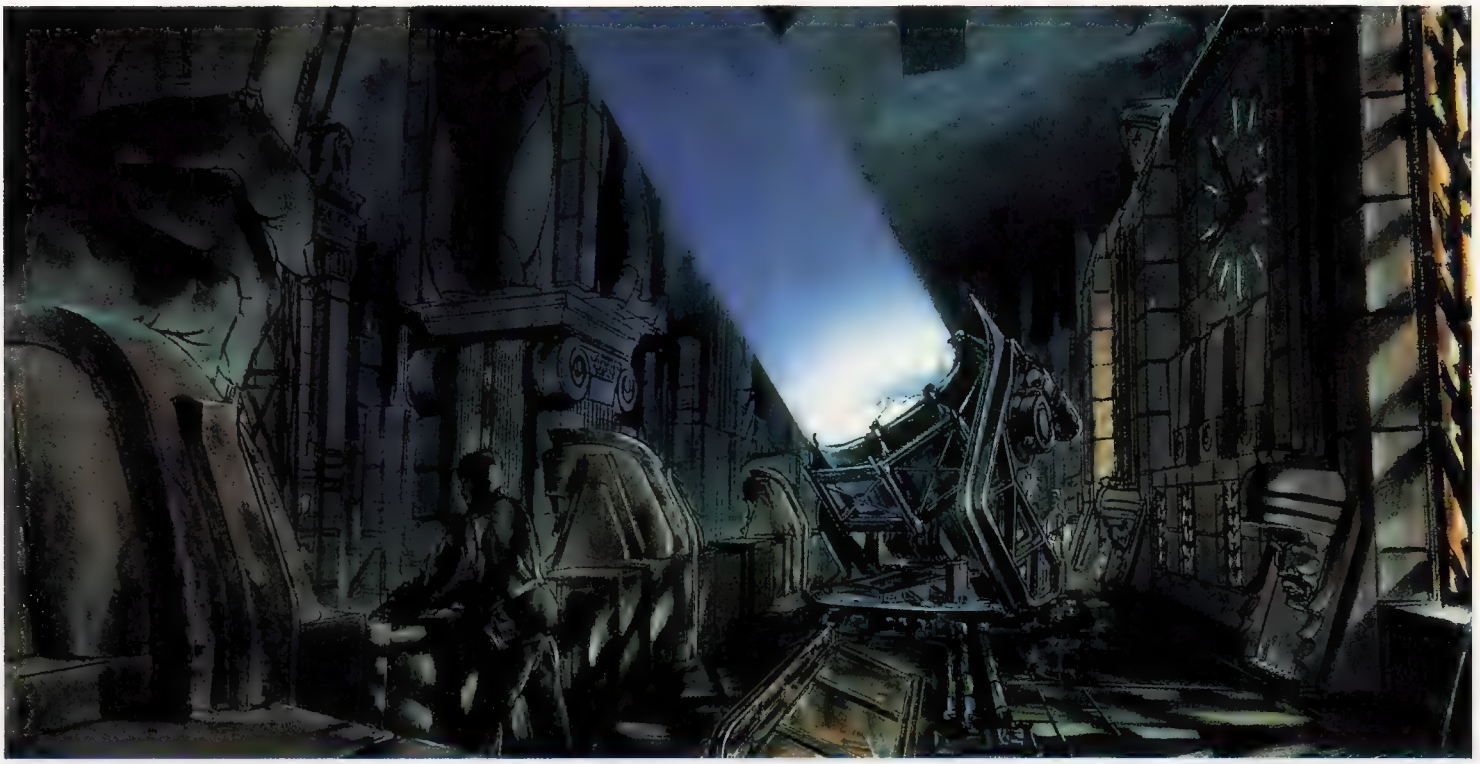
Barbara Ling, production designer

Some people ask for trouble. Whatever your opinion on Tim Burton's first *Batman* movie, the one thing everybody agreed on was the high quality of Anton Furst's Gothic production design – this wasn't the camp Caped Crusader anymore, but the trendier, gloomier Dark Knight, and all the better for it. Later – after Furst's tragic suicide – Bo Welch stepped in to design the second film in the same style. The philosophy seemed to be, 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' – and why not? Of all the many changes made for the third film, it was the decision to rejig the look of Batman that worried fans the most.

So why change a winning formula? One obvious answer is that if you don't move forwards, you're actually going backwards, and even the best designs in the world need rethinking from time to time. The other is that new production designer Barbara Ling wanted to. When director Joel Schumacher offered her the job, she agreed, on the proviso that "We're going to do our own version, right?"

WITH SCHUMACHER IN COMPLETE AGREEMENT, BARBARA LING SET about redesigning *everything* – from the Bat-gadgets to the sets – so that nothing from the previous movies remained. The first question, then, is obvious: Why make life so difficult for yourself?

"It was mine and Joel's decision," she tells me. "My feeling is that the excitement of the comic book comes from the fact that with



The pre-production illustrations, which were painted by a team of illustrations from Ling's original rough sketches, were more for marketing purposes than help with the set design.

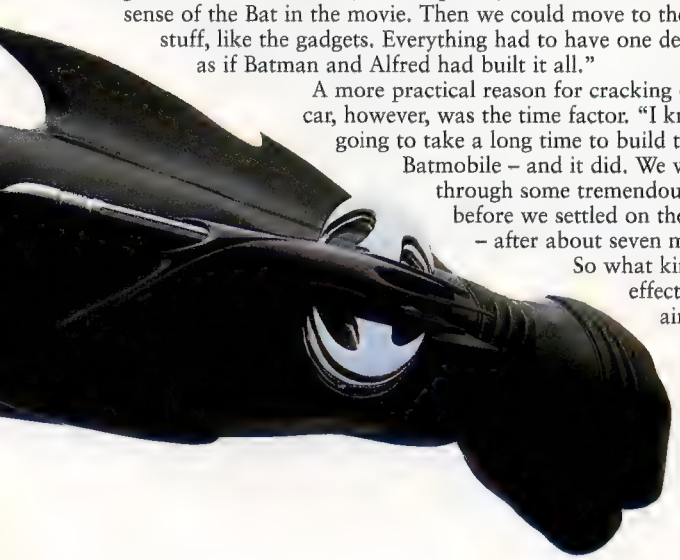
every illustrator new ideas come out. I mean, look at the Frank Miller stuff next to early Bob Kane – it's stunningly different. So why not do that with the movies?"

And Gotham City's certainly changed – now it looks somewhere between a Pet Shop Boys video and Cecil B DeMille's *Intolerance,* dominated by massive buildings and skyscraper-sized statues.

"I was going for World Fair proportions," explains Ling, "a real mixture of architecture. It's kind of Russian constructivist designs mixed with Japanese futurism and a little bit of German art deco. I was fusing them all together to create what I call a new Gothic, or something. I was trying to create a monumental rather than claustrophobic city."

And monumental it most certainly is – very unlike her other design work in more naturalistic movies like David Byrne's *True Stories* (her first film), *Making Mr Right, Fried Green Tomatoes* and *The Doors.* Strangely enough, it was working with Schumacher on the "real life" *Falling Down* that eventually led to her involvement with *Batman.*

OF COURSE, DESIGNING BATMAN ISN'T JUST A CASE OF PENCILLING A few buildings. In fact, the cityscape is just the tip of the iceberg. A new Batmobile was needed, for a start – and a new Batcave. "We wanted to design Batman's world first," she explains, "so there was an overall sense of the Bat in the movie. Then we could move to the other stuff, like the gadgets. Everything had to have one design stamp, as if Batman and Alfred had built it all."



A more practical reason for cracking on with the car, however, was the time factor. "I knew it was going to take a long time to build the Batmobile – and it did. We went through some tremendous models before we settled on the final one – after about seven months!"

So what kind of an effect were you aiming for?

"The single fin was very important to me, I remember. I loved the idea of it reflecting from the side in the shape of a bat. All four Batmobiles we did models of had the big fin on top."

The schizophrenic nature of Harvey Two-Face is reflected in Linn's early design for his hideout, which is pretty much identical to the finished version seen in the movie.

Working with illustrator Tim Flannery, who provided her with some much needed auto-design knowledge, Ling decided that the movie's lighting would be another major factor in the car's design.

"What I really wanted to do was find a way to get it to illuminate itself. The biggest problem with a black car, especially when it's out at night, is that it's difficult to see. That's why having the illumination coming from the inside became very important. Illuminating the ribs was difficult, though – we had to have tiny neon lights everywhere."

The wheels were another case of Ling making life hard for herself.

"I was determined to have the logo on the hub caps static, so the Bats remained upright the whole time – except you can't do that, because it's so tough on the wheel bearings, apparently. But eventually we figured it out."

So is the car roadworthy, or is it just a movie prop?

"Oh, sure it's roadworthy. It's got a 350 cubic inch *[about 5.7 litres – Ed]* Chevy small-block engine, and a carbon fibre body so it's light, and it can open up to about 120mph. We did a lot of testing out in the desert – the boys had it up to about 100, at least, with more to come."

SIMPLY HAVING THE TIME TO DO EVERYTHING REQUIRED IS ONE OF THE main bugbears with a film of this size, as Barbara Ling soon

Ling reluctantly had to let go of her "beautiful collection" of pre-production paintings – they're now to go on show in a special *Batman* museum built at the Warner studios.

discovered... Early on in production, for instance, she was asked to produce a set of huge pre-production paintings...

"The marketing on this movie was big," she says, "And we had a problem, because they needed a lot in advance, but I didn't have time to sit down and do the paintings. So what I'd do is rough the things out, then get all these illustrators to do them for me."

For practical design purposes, Ling opted to build models of most of the sets, rather than use the paintings.

"I'm a big fan of building models to show to directors," she says. "It doesn't matter how beautifully you build something if they only shoot one corner of it – not that that doesn't happen, of course, no matter how hard you try to avoid it."

Even more annoying is not being able to build your favourite set...

"Yeah, in the comics there's Arkham Square, which is kind of the Las Vegas of Gotham. And we had a whole sequence set there, with huge 3D signs. We'd developed that quite a way – it was like Vegas gone insane, where everywhere you looked there would be a madcap mixture of signs. There was going to be a very big effects action sequence set there, but they did rewrites and it was gone..."

BATMAN FOREVER IS THE FIRST OF THE RECENT BATFILMS TO USE extensive location footage, something Schumacher and Ling agreed to go with very early on...

"That's right," she says. "I wanted to do an enormous amount in New York, especially in the Wall Street Area, because of the sense of 'canyon' you get there. You can't really build those kind of proportions on a backlot..."

But, as Ling points out, these "real" shots rarely go undoctored.

"I think what's very exciting is when you start with real architecture, then matte in miniatures and computer-generated objects on top of it. We combined real streets with computer architecture a lot in the movie, and that way you can get really vast, believable vistas that wouldn't be physically possible, either in a studio or on a real street."

It all sounds a logistic nightmare – was it?

"No, it was actually great fun!" she laughs. "I loved working with [effects supervisor] John Dykstra and the CGI people. It's fabulous to see them creating beautiful 3D compositions from your roughs."

Researching the Bat-mythology was no chore for Ling either, who is a self-confessed Batfan: "Even before *Batman Forever,* I had access to very rare Batman comics from my childhood. By the time I started on the movie I think I'd read every Batman comic ever done!"

> **"Even before *Batman Forever* came along, I had access to very rare Batman comics from my childhood. By the time I started on the movie I think I'd read every Batman comic ever done!"**
>
> **Barbara Ling, production designer**

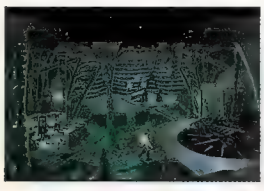
One particular influence, as mentioned, was Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* series – surprising, perhaps, because it was the very series that inspired the dark, moody look of the first two movies.

"But in *The Dark Knight,*" argues Ling, "there are also these incredible washes of colour. The panels were actually often very vivid and beautiful, and that's the colour sensibility we used in our film."

Indeed, the film is almost colour-coded, each character and situation being assigned specific colours for their costumes, domains and lighting. Two-Face is red, black and magenta, for instance, while Batman's all steel blues, cobalt and purples.

After a year and ten months with "a head full of Batstuff," Ling is now taking a few months off. But having changed the face of Gotham City, how would she feel about some new designer coming along in a film or two and starting from scratch?

"That'd be great!" she says energetically. "I think it'll be very exciting to see what happens to it next..."



Batman Forever *is now on general release, and reviewed on page 72. And we dribble over it just as embarrassingly there too...*

KING CONGO

FIRST IT WAS DEADLY SPIDERS, NOW IT'S KILLER GORILLAS. THE DIRECTOR WHO WOULD BE STEVEN SPIELBERG, FRANK MARSHALL, EXPLAINS TO **DAVE GOLDER** WHY HE'S BACK IN THE JUNGLE GIVING ANOTHER '50S B-MOVIE PLOT (CONSIDERED FOR INDY 3, AT ONE POINT!) THE '90S TREATMENT...

What Steven Spielberg did for '30s cliffhangers with the *Indiana Jones* films, Frank Marshall seems determined to do for '50s monster flicks – first with *Arachnophobia,* and now with *Congo*. Hardly surprising really, considering Marshall spent a good deal of the '80s learning how to imitate Spielberg from the Earl of Amblin himself. Not that Marshall, an experienced film producer, was any rank beginner...

"After I got to asked to produce *Raiders of the Lost Ark,*" he explains, "Steven, Kathy Kennedy and I formed Amblin, and that went along great for ten years. During that time I was directing second units for Bob Zemeckis and Steven. I did bits like the terrorist attack in *Back to the Future,* and the speedboat chase in *Indy 3*... I just got the itch that directing was a direction I wanted to go in."

Not bad guys to learn the trade from...

"Yeah, the job of the second unit director is to mimic the first unit director, so that my shots look just like their shots. My goal was always to give them something extra so they would pat me on the back and say, 'That's a good idea.' They were great enough to let me do my own thing as long as I did it on schedule."

Frank Marshall (right) shows Tim Curry there's nothing up his sleeve. Marshall admits that at the end of a shoot he treats the crew to a magic show, which he performs very much in the style of "your very own Tommy Cooper – he was a genius."

All pictures © Paramount Pictures

MARSHALL EMBARKED ON A DIRECTING CAREER proper with 1990's Jeff Daniels/John Goodman thriller *Arachnaphobia* – a film which, with its great white explorers, jungles and '50s sci-fi-style monsters, was very much a precursor to *Congo*. *Alive* – the will they/won't they crashed-Rugby-players-must-eat-dead-bodies-to-survive flick – followed, but *Congo* marks a return to much more Spielbergian thrills.

"I wanted to make a Summer movie – a kind of an old-fashioned adventure film – and *Congo* was out there. It has an interesting storyline which combines lots of different elements, and with the Lost City and the diamonds at the end it's very much like the *Indiana* films. In fact, the book has been around for about 15 years, and when we were looking for ideas for *Indy 3* we were thinking about it as a possible basis for the plot. Later, when I got talking to Michael Crichton he reminded me that nobody's ever done that book."

Marshall, encouraged by the effects advances on *Jurassic Park,* decided he'd like to have a shot at bringing the book's intelligent gorillas to the screen. But once he'd committed to the script, he discovered that things weren't going to be quite that easy...

"Eventually, we found out that the one thing you can't do with CGI effects is hair. So all the advances we'd made on *Jurassic Park* were of no value to me."

OUT WENT THE COMPUTERS, THEN, AND IN came make-up maestro Stan Winston, veteran of films like *Aliens* and *Interview with the Vampire*. His main challenge was to make Amy, the ape who's taught to talk using sign language, a believable supporting character – in terms of both looking and acting the part.

"I said to Stan: 'If I can't do a close-up shot of Amy then the movie's not going to work'," Marshall remembers. "The costume had to be the best ever, but she also needed to have her own personality. That's what I found out when I hung out at Zoo Atlanta with the gorillas. They have their own quirky personalities – they get jealous and moody, happy and sad. We gave all those emotions to Amy."

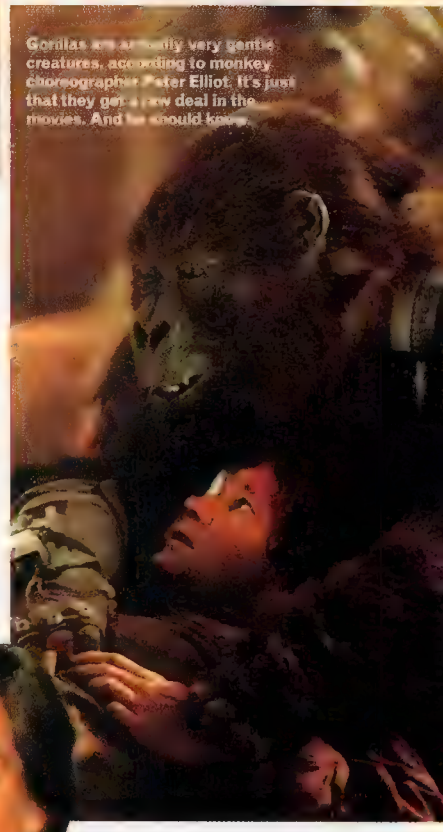
But it wasn't easy. Ten people were required to operate her, and that – combined with the fact that the two 19 year old girls who played the gorilla were blind whenever they had the head on – made realistic movements, and getting the other actors to react to her believably, a major headache.

Still, the hard work obviously paid off... "After we'd finished the film," says Marshall,

If Amy hadn't been convincing, then the whole project would have been pointless, reckons Marshall.

In the quest for realism the masks had to have one big design flaw – they left the actors completely blind.

Marshall and Stan Winston are particularly proud of this shot. Amy mixes, picks up and drinks the cocktail all in one smooth shot. It was achieved using a mixture of clever costume design and "illusion." Show-offs.



Gorillas are actually very gentle creatures, according to monkey choreographer Peter Elliot. It's just that they get a raw deal in the movies. And he should know.

"I wanted to make a Summer movie – a kind of old-fashioned adventure film."

Frank Marshall, director

(From left to right) Gorilla creator Stan Winston, director Frank Marshall and producer Kathleen Kennedy try to camouflage themselves with varying degrees of success...

"I brought the primatologist I'd worked with at Zoo Atlanta to see the movie, and I said, 'Tell me what doesn't look like a real gorilla.' He was over the moon with it, and said that – apart from a few shots – that's just what gorillas do."

Surely it's not *that* realistic though? What about the immaculately groomed silverback who shows up at one point? Is there a Toni and Guy's somewhere in the Congo?

"I complained about that too," he laughs, "but that's the way they are. When you see them in the wild they look like that."

DESPITE A NUMBER OF SCOUTING MISSIONS, very little of the movie was actually shot on location – and most of that was animal footage shot in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. "Our cameraman, Alan Daviau, did a great job of integrating all the footage," says Marshall. "I watched *Greystoke* a lot for inspiration."

Many fans of the book complain that the intelligent grey apes have been downgraded to something akin to Chelsea supporters in the film. Was this just a case of footage ending up on the cutting room floor?

"No, it was a conscious choice," Marshall explains. "I didn't want you to like them at all. Also, once we got to that first grey attack, you have to keep the pressure on until the end of the movie. We couldn't figure out how to go away to where the greys live and get to meet them without ruining the pace of the story."

And that wasn't the only major change from the novel.

"People who've read the book are surprised that the film is funny. The book is very dry and serious. When they start laughing, they wonder: 'Am I supposed to be laughing at it?' I also decided to give a different spin on all the usual clichéd characters. So Monroe, the great white hunter, is played by black actor Ernie Hudson. And Laura Lynne plays this strong female character rather than one that's fainting every time she sees a snake. I liked to keep the film full of twists and turns."

Sadly, the best twist of all never got filmed. At the end of *Congo*, all our heroes make their escape in a large, slow-moving hot air balloon...

"Don't think that there weren't times when I though it would be great to have that balloon sailing off into a beautiful sunset and then, nyaaaa – bang!," laughs Marshall.

So, after all this ape experience, would he like to get involved in the upcoming remake of *Planet of the Apes?* Or has he had enough?

"Well, Stan Winston is involved in the new version, but I think they should have a word with me first. They may not know what they're getting into..."

Congo *is on general release now and reviewed on page 76.*

T-shirt, chair and baseball cap winners – Frank 'n' Kathy.

MONKEY BUSINESS

GORILLA CHOREOGRAPHY ISN'T EXACTLY THE SORT OF JOB YOU SEE ADVERTISED DOWN THE LOCAL JOB CENTRE, BUT AS EXPERT **Peter Elliot** EXPLAINS, IT'S AS IMPORTANT AS ANY MAKE-UP EFFECT WHEN IT COMES TO CREATING REALISTIC SIMIANS.

Gorilla choreography in action – it's like training Pan's People, but with a bit less hair and a little more grunting. Or should that be the other way around?

Peter Elliot, who fell into the job of ape choreography 17 years ago, has worked on 18 movies, over 50 commercials and at least ten TV series – not bad for a career that sounds limiting to say the least. His latest challenge was, needless to say, *Congo* – an effects-heavy spectacle which wouldn't have worked half as well without his services.

"There's not really anybody else in the business who specialises in choreographing special effects costumes," he explains. "Years ago, they'd spend half a million on a costume, give it no rehearsals, then wonder why the results were disappointing."

Not any more though. Since *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes,* Elliot's life – and the way film companies prepare the actors who wear special effects costumes – has changed.

"Originally, I auditioned for a part as one of the apes in *Greystoke,*" Elliot remembers. "They'd built a chimp suit in LA, and were training about 40 people to operate it, but when they did the test film it was abysmal. They liked the research I'd put in, though, and asked me if I would go to LA to do a costume test – they wanted to see if it was the costume or the person inside that was wrong. We did the test film and it went wonderfully, and the job lasted two years."

When, at one point, *Greystoke* was put on hold, Elliot was given a research and development project.

"I worked mainly on Project Washoe at the Oklahoma Primate Centre. I learned sign language there, and spoke sign language to Washoe the chimpanzee. It's amazing, because when Michael Crichton wrote *Congo* in 1980 he did a lot of research on Project Washoe, and, of course, the lead character is called Peter Elliot – that's me!"

Elliot also integrated himself into a chimp community which lived on an island at the Primate centre, mixing with the chimps for 10-15 hours at a time.

"That's the way I developed the method that I use in my work. What I like to do is try to get people to treat it like method acting; it starts from the inside. People like Stan Winston build what's on the outside, but I build what's on the inside."

Striving for realism, Elliot doesn't believe in going easy on his actors...

"I teach them all the basic movements and everything they need technically, but I also try to get them to improvise for five, six, sometimes ten hours at a time, trying to get them to really feel like an ape. I really believe in pushing things to the limit."

Following *Quest for Fire* – the first film he choreographed – and *Greystoke,* Elliot worked on movies like *Kong Lives* and *Harry and The Hendersons.* It's *Congo,* however, that presented him with the greatest challenge.

"Inventing a new species of violent gorilla was a big problem," he explains, "because gorillas are actually peaceful, gentle creatures who just get a bad rap. It's really chimpanzees that have the violence necessary. So I took the weight and size of a gorilla and the violence and speed of a chimpanzee. The result was something a little like a 450 pound chimpanzee, which, as any primatologist would tell you, is an absolutely horrific prospect."

The biggest challenge, however, was Amy.

"It's difficult enough getting people to play a different species, let alone a different species *and* a character. In the end, though, I thought Amy became a lovable character. All the stuff she does in the film is possible – even the hand-speaking glove is in development. The only thing I was scared about was that the public, who aren't aware how bright apes are, might find it all too much of a stretch of the imagination."

"People like Stan Winston build what's on the outside... I build what's on the *inside.*"

Peter Elliot, choreographer

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Missive Control

"A LEG UP"

Dear SFX,
Congratulations on your first issue of SFX. I have been eagerly awaiting its arrival – and it's great! For a long time there has been a gap in the market for SF info, and your magazine fills this perfectly. For future issues, I would love to read some SF short stories (I've read all the "old" ones – can we have some "new" ones please?) Just think, you could create the SF writers of the future by giving them a hand – or a leg – up the publishing ladder! Keep up the good work.

RA Clements
Abingdon

Thanks for the kind words, but if SFX "fits this gap perfectly," why should we spoil it by chucking out half the features to make room for fiction? Even supposing you have read all the "old" stories, there are plenty of new ones in Interzone, Beyond, Asimov's, F&SF, *etc. to be going on with. Our remit is to publish articles about people who write those stories, not the stories themselves.*

"LETTERS OF THE ALPHABET"

Dear SFX,
The première issue of SFX was, to say the least, absolutely wonderful! Here are a few questions and suggestions for you to keep in mind for future issues.
1. I know SFX is devoted to SF, but it might be a good idea to list all the new movies at the cinema and released on video. Most of your readers, including myself, probably enjoy the odd comedy or drama.
2. How about reviewing the SF movies of the last year or so, like *Jurassic Park*, over the next few issues. You might think this is a bit pointless because people have already seen most of them and formed their own opinions, but it will be interesting to read yours.
3. What, in your opinion, are the top three SF movies of all time?
4. Could you try doing your review marking in percentages, not particular letters of the alphabet, like most computer mags?

Russ Simmons
Bucks

Kong! SFX staff writer Simo's fave SF flick has apes, babes and dinosaurs, but *still* lacks the "giant spiders" sequence...

1. We suggest you read mags like Empire *or* Film Review *for that, Russ.*
2. Sorry, but we've got no room.
3. Matt: Aliens, Star Wars, Close Encounters; *Dave:* Forbidden Planet, The Thing *(remake)*, Blade Runner *(original cut); Mike:* King Kong *(original)*, 2001, Dark Star.
4. We're not most – or indeed, any – computer mag, and anyway, we can't be that specific.

"ANALLY-RETENTIVE NO-HOPER"

Dear SFX,
Call me a sad and lonely, anally-retentive no-hoper if you like, but I've spotted that about 32-33 minutes into my commercially released copy of the "Ice" episode of *The X-Files*, just after Scully has locked Mulder in a store-room, there's a short, ten-second sequence of her standing next to some sort of shutter, then looking back at the locked store-room door, before disappearing off down a corridor.

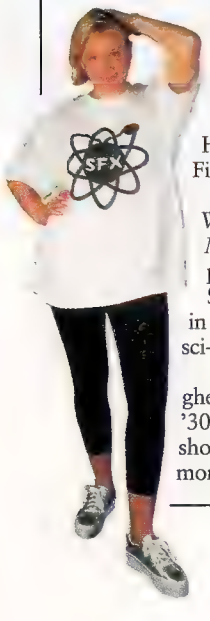
However, when the episode was screened on BBC 2 last year (yes, I have an off-air recording as well), this sequence was missing. Can anyone explain this disturbing – dare I say it, spooky – discrepancy?

I look forward to your next issue...

Severyn Janes
Dulwich

"UMBILICAL CORD"

Dear SFX,
WOAH, SHIT – WHAT A MAG! I had no idea



T-SHIRT WINNER!

"HISTORY AND SOCIOLOGY"

Dear SFX,
This stuff in SFX – what shall we call it?

Has it one name? Or more? Sci-Fi? Science Fiction? SF?

SCI-FI is broadcast. It's *Star Wars* and *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *Alien* model kits and people saying "Beam me up, Scottie." It's heroes and villains in tight, shiny clothes. The most sci-fi thing is a ray gun.

SCIENCE FICTION is ghetto. It's the magazines from the '30s on. It's the conventions, the shops and buying three novels a month. It's the Hugos and Nebulas, Leonard Nimoy lectures, dressing up as Cybermen, the requisite sense of wonder and irritable sense of neglect. The most science fiction thing is the sometimes crass, sometimes sublime cover art of a book or magazine: A tiny silver craft cruising beneath the nine moons of Xos.

SF is serious. It's Arthur C Clarke and George Orwell and Philip K Dick and Ursula K Le Guin. It's HG Wells, JG Ballard and Jonathan Swift. It's discussing the Internet and AIDS, *Star Trek* and *Westworld*. It's cyberpunk and New Wave. It's history and sociology and a surprise about every page. The most SF thing is finding that SF can be better than Art.

Mike Belbin
London

You raise some valid points here, Mike. The term "sci-fi" in particular generates much controversy among hardcore fans. SFX has been criticised for using "sci-fi" in supposedly "wrong" contexts – but are these complaints justified outrage or just elitist snobbery?

After all, "sci-fi," is in common usage, has no other meanings (unlike "SF" which can mean, for instance, San Francisco), was coined by science fiction fans in the '50s, and often just sounds better than its synonyms. Your definitions seem to us to be a good starting point, even if the edges of the three sub-genres do blend together...

We welcome other correspondence on the subject, and will in the meantime continue to use all three terms in the magazine, depending on what it is we're talking about. We're nothing if not controversial...

that such a fantastic mag was coming out – fortunately, I managed to avoid any advertising or hype, so I didn't know what to expect when I picked it up off the shelf in my local WH Smith. But it looked good – wasn't at a bad price – and I was curious, so I bought it.

Friday night, and I'm meant to be revising for my university finals, but for some strange reason I couldn't put SFX down. Maybe it's because I love SF more than anything else, or the fact that SFX is glossy, packed with articles, reviews anything and everything that's reviewable, has major league heavyweight interviews and is honestly likeable. That's three hours of revision down the pan! Cheers, guys!

The sheer amount of info in 98 pages was unbelievable. It's an amalgam of all the various sci-fi mags I've ever read about, but with innovations. The ideas were so fresh, the umbilical cord was still attached!

I also discovered something that has been missing from the current array of sci-fi mags – humour. I couldn't help but crease up at little articles like Objets d'Arse, *Star Trek* Captains Compared and that *pièce de résistance* Couch Potato. I've been there and done that.

There is very little I can find fault with in SFX. I only hope you haven't exhausted your ideas to the point where you have to become a grotmag and scrape the bottom of the barrel for ideas just to maintain your readership. "Once you start down the path leading to the dark side, there is no turning back..."

I've consulted Mystic Meg with regard to the fortunes of SFX. She says: "...because Russell Grant's arse is in alignment with that-bloke-off-the-Virgin-Radio-ads, SFX is destined to have a long and prosperous run with many spin-off magazines."

Amjad P Zaidi
Harrow

"Off-beat humour and visceral action"

Dear SFX,
Actually, *Alien 4* is about the Alien homeworld, but who's complaining?

Were it not for his involvement with the *Aliens*-like *Starship Troopers,* wouldn't Paul Verhoeven have been ideal as a director? With his blend of off-beat humour and visceral action, Fox need look no further.

He also dealt with another character (like Ripley) resurrected from the dead to become larger than life – namely, *RoboCop.*

Good luck with SFX, but please don't pad it out with TV SF trivia. The absence of an X-Files article was a recommendation in itself.

Leslie Skingle
London

Actually, Leslie, Alien 4 *isn't about* anything *because it hasn't actually been made yet. At least three different scripts have been commissioned over the years, but until it goes into production, nothing is carved in stone. Or do you sit on the board of 20th Century Fox, and thus know something we don't?*

Watch out for more news on Verhoeven's adaptation of Heinlein's classic Starship Troopers *in a future issue of SFX.*

"Fnjoyfd"

Dfar Fditor,
I am writing to say how much I fnjoyfd your nfw magazinf. Mind you, I only bought it bfcausf I misrfad thf titlf.

Charlif Cook
Aldfrlfy Fdgf

"Cheap and cheesy"

Dear SFX
If your readers are into cheap and cheesy SF they should try and catch sight of *War of the Worlds* (the series), currently showing on Thursday nights in some ITV regions. It stars the son of Professor Forster (hero of the classic 1953 film). Also, do you know where I can get a copy of the first issue of *The X-Files* comic?

Jake Harvey
Roxburghshire

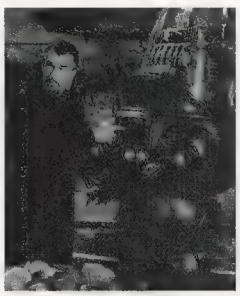
This explains the faint whirring noise disturbing the nation's sleep each Thursday night – it's HG Wells spinning in his grave.

Many good comics shops should have The X-Files *#1, but be warned that the original US edition now sells for between £15-£75.*

This issue's nomination for the SFX Hall of Fame comes from Terry Bowyer (100442.3431@compuserve.com.) Terry will be pleased to hear that his fave SF movie has just come out on vid in Widescreen. We can't promise an immediate release for *your* Best Bit Of Science Fiction Ever, but keep 'em coming and we'll see what we can do. Please remember to keep your eulogies short and to the point!

Forbidden Planet

"Based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* this film broke the mould as far as '50s science fiction was concerned. Most SF at the time tended to be concerned with either Man-versus-Nature *(Them!, Tarantula)* or as thinly disguised anti-communist propaganda *(I Married a Monster from Outer Space, Invasion of the Body Snatchers). Forbidden Planet,* however, was true science fiction, containing many elements that you can still see in decent films today.



"This one has it all – space exploration, ancient civilisations, flying saucers, lots of really *big* alien machines, a great robot (Robbie), a big scary monster and a sexually naive young girl wearing a variety of really short skirts! It also provides technical jargon that would make Scottie glow with pride (What *is* a 'special klystron frequency modulator'?) and one or two classic lines ('This is negligible... The total potential must be nothing less than astronomical!')

"As if this weren't enough, the film also contains two classic scenes. Who can forget Dr Morbius (Walter Pigeon) conducting Commander Adams (Leslie Nielsen!) and the ship's doctor around the 200,000 year old, 8,000 cubic mile Krell super computer, for instance? And the attack on the rescue ship by the 'Monster of the Id' still looks good after nearly 40 years – it always reminds me of the Imperial Walker attack on the Hoth Rebel Base from *The Empire Strikes Back.* The monster itself was created and animated by staff from the Walt Disney studios, as were many of the spot effects seen throughout the film.

"Forbidden Planet is, without a doubt, a true milestone in SF cinema history, and contains lots of the Best Bits Of Science Fiction Ever. I rest my case."

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David Langford

We Told You So

SF authors spend a lot of time wriggling uncomfortably at the common belief that they're in the business of predicting the future. After all, their main ambition is to fill a book with plausible lies that thousands will enjoy reading – preferably in a hardback bought at full price. Accuracy doesn't come high on the agenda...

Which was why it was such a surprise when Isaac Asimov lambasted George Orwell because – guess what? – *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was all wrong. Other critics, however, gave Orwell credit for describing a possible future in such terrifying terms he might well have helped avert it.

The best way to look at SF prediction is as a fascinating game. Writers try to think up interesting and not too daft ideas, and sooner or later there are so many in print some of them *have* to be on target.

For example, it was merely a broad stroke of satire when Robert Heinlein "predicted," in *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961), a daffy future America where the one reliable way to get the ear of the most powerful man in the Western world was – wait for it – through his wife's astrologer. Decades later, along come Ron and Nancy Reagan...

Some things get "predicted" in SF just because they're possible, in theory. Who do you think dreamed up artificial satellites? No, it wasn't Arthur C Clarke (although he got it right about communications satellites in a 1945 *Wireless World* article). It was Edward Everett Hale, writing in 1869. But he picked a somewhat unlikely construction material, as subtly hinted in his story's title, *The Brick Moon*.

Atomic weapons? That idea's been around since 1905, when Einstein first showed what a good exchange rate you get converting mass to energy, and HG Wells dropped the Bomb in *The World Set Free* (1914). That same year he also coined the phrase "The War To End War..."

Pollution and eco-doom? One of GK Chesterton's lesser-known stories from 1925 features an anti-pollution protester who wins a bet when – thanks to industrial effluents – he is able, literally, to set the Thames on fire...

TV and videophones were among the wishful-thinking ideas of French author Albert Robida's *The Twentieth Century* (1883). Jules Verne's equally imaginatively titled *Paris in the 20th Century* predicted the National Grid, canned applause and fax machines – all too much for any publisher to swallow in 1863, which was why it didn't appear until 1994. Perhaps it was just a typical publishing delay: "Your cheque is in the post, honest, guv..."

But there are plenty of predictions that haven't come true, yet, as in Max Beerbohm's *Enoch Soames* (1919), which demonstrates convincingly that a bewildered Victorian time traveller will appear in the British Museum Reading Room on the afternoon of 3 June 1997. Come to think of it, the foggy London opening of Charles Dickens' 1852 *Bleak House* anticipates *Jurassic Park* by a long way, with, "a Megalosaurus, 40 feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill." Perhaps next year?

The pundits tend to disparage pre-'70s SF for not having imagined desktop computers (robots that stalked menacingly around the place had so much more dramatic possibility) and the celebrated information revolution. But, in fact, one of the all-time luckiest guesses in science fiction appears in Murray Leinster's short story "A Logic Named Joe." Here, machines called "logics" sound suspiciously like PCs: "It looks like a vision receiver used to, only it's got keys instead of dials, and you punch the keys for what you wanna get." What you get includes TV, weather forecasts, financial information, communications, number-crunching, real-time conferencing... Pretty good guesswork for 1946.

Leinster seemed weirdly prophetic in the '80s, but even more so today. All his desktop "logics" are connected together – it's the Internet! And the menace of the rogue "logic named Joe" isn't that it's a Frankenstein monster. It just wants to work better and increase the free flow of information – by providing new and useful data on the Net, including foolproof ways to rob and murder. The authorities are in a panic, but daren't shut the network down because the entire world relies on it, and...

Doesn't this remind you of stories in the papers recently?

David Langford is up for a Hugo award this year. Yet again.

Rob Scott

"In Murray Leinster's 'A Logic Named Joe,' machines called 'logics' sound suspiciously like PCs: 'It looks like a vision receiver... only it's got keys instead of dials, and you punch the keys for what you wanna get.'"

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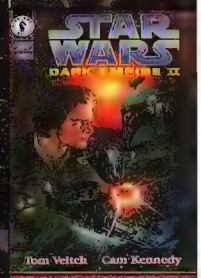

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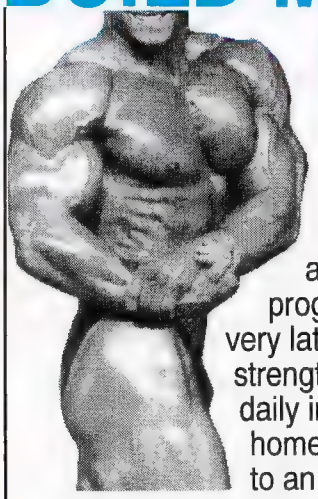

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John Grant

Animation's Maverick

Stop someone in the street and ask them what's the first name that pops into their heads when they hear the words "animated fantasy movies" – and invariably the answer's Disney. Somebody might add a reference to Don Bluth, but no-one has succeeded like Disney in reeling off dozens of well-made and hugely successful animated fantasy features. Even the minor members of the Disney canon, like 1986's *The Great Mouse Detective,* are, in their own terms, excellent movies.

Yet, as in any creative field, sheer quantity doesn't mean quality – and with this in mind, I wonder if we shouldn't stop, think for a moment, and give a quite different answer to that question about the prime name in animated fantasy.

A few years ago I was talking to David R Smith, the Disney archivist, about this very topic, and when one name came up his face twisted. "The man has so much talent! Why does he waste it on such garbage?"

The animator concerned was Ralph Bakshi.

"Who?" I hear you ask...

Dave's reaction is easy to understand. There's a big gulf between Bakshi and Disney. Disney make movies for children which many adults also enjoy; Bakshi, on the other hand, makes movies for adults which are often quite unsuitable for children. Disney offers a regular technical excellence, backed by the company's huge resources, whereas Bakshi's output is decidedly patchy – mainly because many of his movie projects run out of cash at awkward moments.

Ralph Bakshi, born in Palestine in 1938, first made his mark in 1972 with a raunchy comedy, *Fritz the Cat,* based on the comics of RH Crumb. Shattering sexual taboos in a way the censors would never have permitted in a live-action flick, *Fritz* was singularly successful. Next up was *Heavy Traffic* (1973), in which a 22 year old Mafia son tries to lose his virginity in New York. Again, audiences (smaller audiences, mind you) were shocked, and the animation was rudimentary. *Coonskin* (1975), tackling racial issues head-on, was so much disliked you're lucky to find a mention of it in any movie reference book. It's been censored out of history.

But then, in 1977, came *Wizards,* the first of Bakshi's two brilliant fantasy animations. Set two million years after the world has been devastated in a nuclear war, it's a tale of magical warfare between Good – as epitomised by a bumbling, middle-aged wizard — and Evil, personified by his twin. Short and superficially simple, *Wizards* packs a good deal of ethical propaganda into its slight frame. Bakshi here uses animation to do something, rather than just to entertain.

1978 saw the disastrous *The Lord of the Rings,* fatally marred by cash-flow problems, although featuring some nice examples of Bakshi's technique of rotoscoping (live-action figures are filmed, then traced/animated over by hand). *American Pop* (1981) I can't judge because I've never seen it, but *Hey Good Lookin'* (1982) was another slight work, returning to the urban territory of *Heavy Metal. Fire and Ice* (1983), another swords & sorcery number, was better liked. And then, in 1992, came the spectacular *Cool World...*

Rob Scott

"There's a big gulf between Bakshi and Disney. Disney makes movies for kids which adults can enjoy. Bakshi makes movies aimed mainly at adults..."

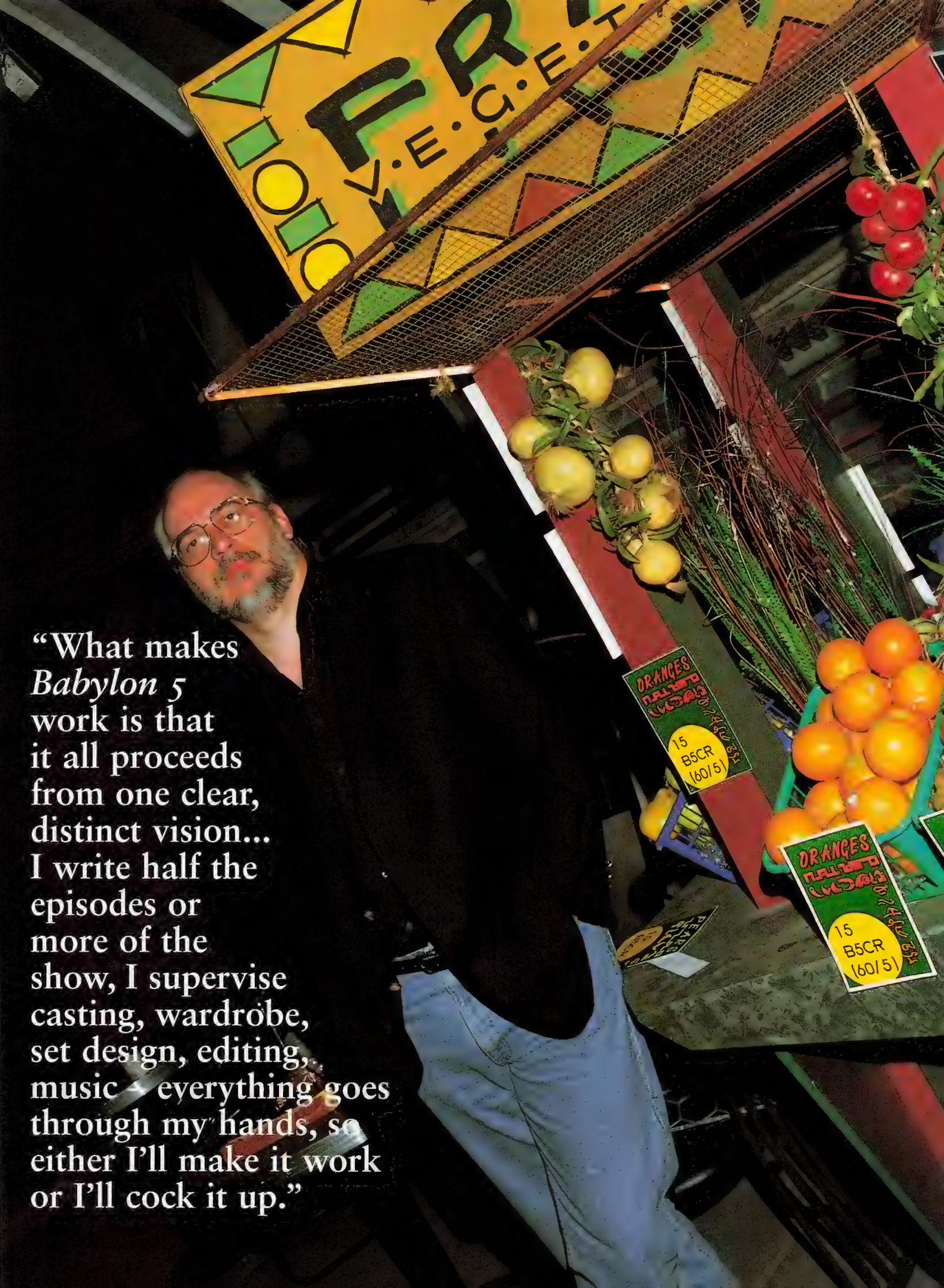
Like *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988), with which it's often adversely compared, *Cool World* mixes animation with live action, but unlike *Who Framed...,* it explores some unusual ideas, and doesn't shy away from the consequences. Convicted of manslaughter, Jack creates – or so he thinks – a comics world to relieve the dreariness of prison life. But, in fact, "his" world, the Cool World, has always existed alongside our own. The interesting premise is that the two worlds should never mix together – if they do, the results could be catastrophic... Unfortunately, in this "real" cartoon world there's a nymphomaniac nightclub singer, Holli, who dreams of making it with a human being, or even becoming one herself, so she reaches out through the medium of Jack's drawing-paper, and...

Well, a lot happens after that, but already you can see that *Cool World* is a tale of the interplay between different realities, subjective and objective, and a clever investigation into what happens when the boundary between the two starts to disintegrate. In my opinion, it's the finest animated fantasy ever made; possibly the finest fantasy movie ever made.

George Eliot wrote a few brilliant novels amid some dross. Marie Corelli wrote dozens of slick but forgettable ones. Who was the greater writer?

So let's try it again: Who is the world's greatest creator of animated fantasy?

John Grant, oddly enough, is – among other things – author of Walt Disney's Encylopaedia of Animated Characters.



"What makes *Babylon 5* work is that it all proceeds from one clear, distinct vision... I write half the episodes or more of the show, I supervise casting, wardrobe, set design, editing, music – everything goes through my hands, so either I'll make it work or I'll cock it up."

J MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI

THERE'S NOT MUCH REAL SCIENCE FICTION ON TELEVISION, THEY SAY, BUT THERE IS BABYLON 5. VIRTUALLY UNIQUE AMONG AMERICAN TV SHOWS, IT ACTUALLY TELLS A STORY – ONE WITH A BEGINNING, A MIDDLE AND (YES!) AN END – AND HAS BEEN STEADILY ACQUIRING FRIENDS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC. THIS ISSUE WE CELEBRATE THE SHOW WITH AN INTERVIEW WITH ITS CREATOR, J MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI, CONDUCTED BY **LIZ HOLLIDAY**, WITH **ANDY LANE** AND **ANDREW ADAMS**.

It's an important show, *Babylon 5*, and one that deserves your respect. And while on the surface it may look like just another space opera, the latest in a lineage dating back to *Lost in Space* and beyond, there's more to it than that. In fact, to SF fans using on-line networks – who've been privy to inside information from the start – it's been clear all along that *Babylon 5* is something quite different. You see, despite appearances, this is no mere clone of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. In many ways, *Babylon 5* bucks the trend of American science fiction TV shows, boasting effects equal to *Star Trek*, but with the gritty feel of a *Blake's 7*. You can be quite sure that you won't understand everything that's going on – no matter how big a fan you are, or how closely you've been watching.

This is one of the big draws of the show – embedded in each week's storyline are plot twists and dark secrets worthy of *Twin Peaks*, together with an astounding attention to detail. Even better, it promises that everything – no matter how confusing or contradictory it may seem – will be explained eventually. From the word go it's been made clear that the series will only last five years, the episodes building up to tell a single story. What SF TV show has promised that before?

This issue of SFX is a bit of a *Babylon 5* special. After this interview, we take a look at the *Babylon 5* phenomenon, including interviews with some of the cast, and a spotter's guide to all the main characters. First, though, we caught up with JM Straczynski himself – creator and executive producer of *Babylon 5* – while he guested at Babcom '95, the commercial *Babylon 5* convention...

Let's talk about the basic idea for the show. Where did it come from?

"*Babylon 5* comes – perhaps unsurprisingly – from looking at history; mainly from looking at ancient Babylon, which we've used as a sort of model. That was a place that started off as a good idea and then got corrupted down the road, becoming something that wasn't all that it should have been. And eventually it fell, as Babylon 5 will fall.

"The other starting point was that I wanted to do something new for American television – a novel. On US TV, no-one had ever done a multi-year storyline with a beginning, a middle and an end. It took five years to find someone who would give me the money to do it."

A lot of positive stuff has been said about this long, complex storyline, but critics have complained that it can be hard for people who haven't seen every episode to follow it. How do you counter that?

"My theory is that each episode must include the information necessary to understand that episode, so it's all there, in almost every case. In some countries, it's aired out of order, but they have no problems following the show. There's a mystique that it takes a lot of background info to get into *Babylon 5*, but in my experience it rarely does."

Others complain that although the overall storyline is strong, the individual episodes often suffer by comparison...

"Yes, I've heard that, but I don't agree with it. The stories are designed to stand individually — after all, no matter how strong the

"I just don't put a lot of emphasis on merchandising – I've seen too many shows ruined by it. I'll do a few things here and there, but I don't want this to turn into a franchise."

Riding shotgun with the pilot of an approaching Star Fury fighter, the Babylon 5 spacestation looms into view. It's a functional design, B5 – as are most things on the show – but a fairly distinctive one. And it looks its size, something that can't always be said of Deep Space Nine...

overall story arc might be, if the individual stories weren't worth watching people wouldn't watch them. But our ratings keep going up."

So are there any individual episodes that you think make a good starting point for those new to the show?

"Season two's 'And Now for a Word.' There's a thing you do in theatre training where you're told to talk about a subject without using the word 'I' – but in the end you wind up saying more about yourself than the subject you're speaking about. It's a very tricky episode, influenced by that, and you learn a lot from it about all kinds of people on *B5*."

One of the most intriguing things about *Babylon 5* is the degree of continuity it's achieved...

"I agree. What makes *Babylon 5* work, I think, is that it all proceeds from one clear vision. It's not a community process. I write half the episodes or more of the show, I supervise casting, wardrobe, set design, editing, music – everything goes through my hands, so either I'll make it work or I'll cock it up."

That must gives you an unprecedented opportunity to plan the series...

"It does. What's good about doing things this way is that, while a lot of shows can have backward continuity – where what happened in show 15 refers to what happened in show nine – hardly anybody can handle forward continuity, where in show nine you plant something that doesn't come to fruition till episode 15. Except us."

Sometimes things must go wrong, though. In the episode "Babylon Squared," where there's a flash forward to the future, and Garibaldi's fighting something off-screen. Freeze frame through that moment, and just for a second his eyes go red. What's that all about?

"Oh, that! I heard about that on an Internet newsgroup. Right after, at our next visual effects meeting, I sat down with Kevin Kutchaver, who

"It's a port of call, a home away from home for diplomats, hustlers, entrepreneurs and wanderers..." Scenes from around B5, watched over by Commander John Sheridan (Bruce Boxleitner).

The mysterious Psi-Corps (inset) cause constant trouble for Sheridan, Ivanova and crew.

does all of our rotoscope effects, and I showed it to him, and I said, 'Before I kill you, explain this to me.' See, what he does when he's rendering scenes where a lot of firing's going on, is he gets bored. And you know when you have a notebook and you fill in eyes and stuff? That's what he was doing. And he hadn't realised that he'd saved one frame of that. So I looked at him, and said, 'If you ever do this to me again, I will come to your house and kill everyone who lives there.'"

It's nice to hear even you can't keep total control! On a similar subject, how much do you tell the people around you? How much, for instance, do the actors know about the pasts and futures of their characters?

"Not much, and I intend to keep it that way. You want them playing the process, not the result."

The biggest change between the first and second seasons was the departure of the Commander of B5, Jeffrey Sinclair (Michael O'Hare), and his replacement by the Bruce Boxleitner character. What happened there? It's been suggested the studio wanted him off the show...

"No, not at all. As anyone who's ever written a novel knows, although you may have an outline of where the story's going, no outline ever survives all the way through to the end. It's similar with this – I've learned things partway through *Babylon 5* that you can learn no other way. At the end of the first season, I looked towards the second one and realised that Sinclair's character was falling by the wayside. G'kar was coming to the fore, as was Londo, and Delenn was changing in a big way. Meanwhile, Sinclair was becoming, I felt, a spear carrier.

"You see, he was originally created to help introduce the show and the characters through his involvement in the Earth/Minbari war, and the Battle of the Line, and so on. However, for the second season I needed someone with a different background at the centre of the story – someone with a direct connection to the Shadows. To give all that to Sinclair, to my mind, would have stretched credulity. I said to O'Hare, 'We can do A, B and C if we keep you here. But we can do A, B, C and D – and D is very cool – if we take a parting of the ways for the time being. And down the road, if things work out between us and you're available, and I'm available, we can tie this off.' He was comfortable with that, I was comfortable with that, and that's what we did."

On a different tack, how do you feel about *Babylon 5* spin-offs?

"I just don't put a lot of emphasis on them – I've seen too many shows ruined by 'em. I'll do a few things here and there, but I don't want this to turn into a franchise."'

But you have allowed a series of original novels and comics to come out, which have expanded some storylines – Sinclair's, in particular...

"Sure. My intention is to use the comics and the novels to explore different parts of the *Babylon 5* universe. My hope is to keep broadly within continuity – though, of course, we have lots of different writers working on these projects, and I can't chase every line in every book.

"People have asked if the comics and books will continue to be written after the TV show is over, but I'm afraid I can't answer yet. I'd hope so, because there's a whole galaxy of stories to tell in the *Babylon 5* universe, but it's a commercial decision I'm not privy to at this time."

With continuity so important, you write a lot of the episodes yourself – you've written 15 of the 22 episodes for season two, for instance. Why so many?

"Actually, it's not that unusual. *Picket Fences* and *ER* are both written by one person. In some ways, that's because it's a very eccentric show to write for – it takes a long time for outside writers to get it. It may take me a month to bring a writer up to speed, whereas I can do a script in five days, so it's just faster to do it myself."

Rumours about two potential writers persist. One is that Harlan Ellison – a conceptual consultant on the show – will write a sequel to his old *Outer Limits* episode "Demon with a Glass Hand" for *B5*; the other is that Neil (*Sandman*) Gaiman may take a turn. Any truth in these?

"I'd certainly hope so! I'd wanted Harlan to write that sequel for season two, but between the earthquake and health problems, by the time he was in a position to write it, we were too deep into the second season to fit it in. With a bit of luck we'll have him do something next year.

"As to the other one, I'd kill to have Neil write for us. I have been bugging him about it, and he keeps saying 'Oh, call me back in two months.' And I call back in two months, and I will continue to call back every two months until he does it for me just to make me leave him alone. It's very tough, but I'm not known for taking 'No' for an answer.

"But beyond that, I'll probably write more episodes on my own for season three than I have up until now, because we're running more of the important story arc episodes all the time. The first season had four or five arc stories, and the second season has about eight or nine. The third year will have 12 or 13, for the fourth year we'll have 16 or 17,

"I'll probably write more episodes for season three, because we're running more of the important arc stories."

"The story's in my head," says Straczynski. "So keep my ass alive for the next five years!"

The great thing about *Babylon 5*'s way of doing effects – all on computer – is that the only real limits are time and imagination. Ship designs, therefore, can be much more radical than in something like, say, *Star Trek*, although the effect remains – for now – *slightly* less realistic...

and the last year will be one huge story. So it cuts down the number of freelancers you can use when all that stuff is going on."

Comic writer Peter David, an old hand at *Trek* novels, has done a few *B5* scripts. They're his first for TV, aren't they?

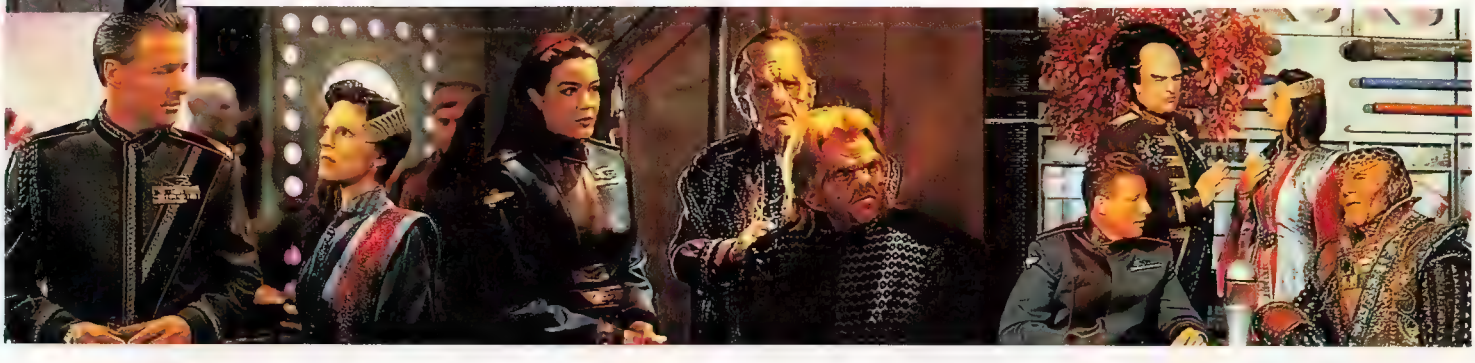
"I think that's right. I assigned him a premise for his first one, which he then took and flew with. He did a very good job – I merely finessed the dialogue in places. When Londo wakes up and says, 'I'm either in Med-Lab or in Hell,' I added 'either way, the decor needs work.'

"I'll give you another example of the sort of thing I do. In Peter's second episode, I added a kind of D storyline, which was the thing about Earth saying, 'Look, Babylon 5 is not paying for itself very well – you're running over-budget. You have to find some way to defray your expenses.' They end up merchandising Babylon 5, and Peter then stepped in and wrote a very funny line in the teaser where Ivanova's complaining about this and says, 'We're not some deep space franchise – this is about something important.' That line should raise some hackles somewhere at Paramount!

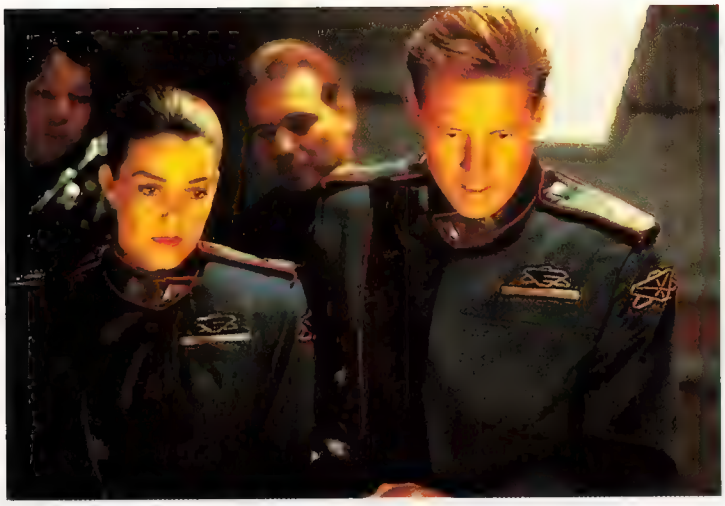
"As part of writing the episode, Peter sent me a gift – a teddy bear with 'Bearbalon 5' on the back, and the initials JS for Joe Straczynski. I phoned Peter up and I said, 'You must understand – never send me anything cute. I hate cute. I'll get you for this.' And I did – that very teddy bear crops up at the end of 'There All the Honor Lies.'"

What TV shows do you yourself enjoy?

"The shows I watch the most are the ones where you're on an emotional rollercoaster – where you're laughing one scene and hit between the eyes the next. I think it's important to take audiences through a range of emotions and characters. The best American series I've seen that did that is *Hill Street Blues*. There was one episode – a very powerful and emotional one – where the C story was trying to rescue the mayor's dog, and at the end you've gone through this terribly emotional story, and Lieutenant Hunter's upstairs playing with the dog,



"Humans and aliens wrapped in two million, five hundred thousand tons of spinning metal..." This time it's hard-nut security officer Michael Garibaldi (Jerry Doyle) keeping an eye on things.



Claudia Christian (left) plays Sheridan's hard-boiled second-in-command, Susan Ivanova.

bouncing a ball on the table. The ball bounces through a fifth floor window, and the dog sails out after it, which had me on the floor..."

Are there any actors you'd particularly like to work with?

"Very much so. I still want Patrick McGoohan to do more for us, for instance – we had him briefly in season one. He would have played Knight Two in 'Sky Full of Stars,' but unfortunately he was out of the country at the time. We were disappointed about that, but I intend to go back and try again somewhere down the road."

You have quite a few British actors on the show, don't you?

"I have a weakness for the British style of acting. Plus, when I was growing up I incredibly admired British science fiction series – I mean, what we're doing on *Babylon 5* is nothing new to you guys. *The Prisoner* was a show with a beginning and an end. *Blake's 7* had an on-going story line. *Doctor Who* treated science fiction as a character driven thing. So I've always loved the British series, and it shows in my casting. My feeling is, you cast the best actor who walks in the room. When an RSC guy walks in, you pretty much forget everybody else."

A lot of the success of the series must be down to the casting. Andreas Katsulis (G'Kar) and Peter Jurasik (Londo) are particularly fine...

"Andreas is great to work with – but G'kar is almost like a real person. You see, when Andreas turns up in the morning, he doesn't hang out on the set – he goes right into make-up. This spectre zooms through the background to the changing room, and reappears as G'kar. When he's fully in G'kar make-up, with the red contacts, you wonder who you're talking to – because it's like you're talking to a real Narn. It's not like, 'Here's Andreas, and here's Andreas in make-up.' It's 'Here's Andreas, and here's G'kar.'

"Peter is also terrific, and he's relishing the opportunity we're giving him here because, as a rule, he tends to play more comedic parts – he's always wanted to do dramatic stuff."

Another person who seems to fit his part exactly is Jerry Doyle...

"Yes! He just came in and he *was* Garibaldi. I knew something wasn't quite right when I looked at his resume and it said, 'Member: Dance Company of Harlem' – which is an all-black dance troupe! I said, 'Okay, dance for us!', at which point he admitted, 'No, it's not true!' He'd just made it up to look good. So I figured this is our Garibaldi."

The most intriguing character on the show, though, has to be Ambassador Kosh. What exactly *is* under Kosh's encounter suit?' Rumour has it you reveal that at the end of season two...

"We do! We have an extra day's shooting for the last episode of season two. And it's a hell of an episode. On scripts you have scene numbers, and on a heavy script you'll have 60 scenes, or maybe 90. This had 134 shots total, of which 64 are effects shots – four more than we had in the pilot – and 34 are composite shots, which are very hard to do. It's probably the single most ambitious hour ever done for television, so it'll either be extraordinary, or we'll fall on our faces. It's worth it, though – trying and failing, as opposed to never trying at all."

You were the first SF show to go so far with computer-generated special effects. How has this affected the show?

"The most important thing is that it's given us more freedom that we could possibly have had with models. We're using more (and more complex) sfx per episode than any other show around, and CGI has simply given us the creative freedom to do what we want to do."

It's been a massive undertaking, *Babylon 5*. The big question has to be, can you possibly top it?

"Probably. But it might be that after *Babylon 5* I'll have said all I want to say in TV. I'll be 44 or 45 at that point, and I figure to take the rest of my years writing novels – maybe in England, actually."

That's assuming it doesn't get cancelled, of course...

"I can't even allow that thought to cross my mind! In 1987 I got it into my head that *B5* was going to get the full five years – and it will."

But what happens if you fall under a bus or something? Is there a secret file somewhere, or an heir to take over?

"I'm afraid it's all in my head. I've said on numerous occasions, 'I am doing this story, and if I croak you ain't getting my notes.' So it's in your best interests to keep my ass alive for the next five years."

JM Straczynski, thank you very much.

"I have a weakness for British acting... When an RSC guy walks in you pretty much forget everybody else."

"You'll notice John Sheridan and Jeff Sinclair have the same initials as me," laughs JMS.

The Rough Guide to...

BABYLON 5

NEW TO BABYLON 5 AND ITS MANY ALIEN INHABITANTS? CONFUSED BY JM STRACZYNSKI'S INFAMOUS "STORY ARCS"? NOT QUITE SURE WHICH CHARACTER IS WHICH, OR WHAT THEIR AGENDAS ARE? THEN JOIN THE CLUB. IT'S FUN TRYING TO WORK IT ALL OUT, THOUGH, WHICH IS WHY WE'VE PUT TOGETHER THIS BABYLON 5 STARTER PACK TO GET YOU GOING...

The Rough Guide includes...

The story so far...
Unsure what's going on in JM Straczynski's sci-fi epic? Then you need Jim Swallow's breakdown of the story so far...

Who's who in Babylon 5?
What's he/she/it called again? Join Jim Swallow for a potted guide to all the main characters, from G'Kar to the mysterious Kosh.

One tough cookie!
Claudia Christian talks to Jane Killick about playing Babylon 5's Russian First Officer and life on the galactic firing line.

War child
Minbari ambassador Delenn – actress Mira Furlan – talks about being alien, twice over, with Jane Killick.

Now that's a spaceship!
Foundation Imaging talks to Steve Jarratt about taking the digital effects of *Babylon 5* into a new era...

Spacestation Babylon 5 is the stage for Straczynski's epic five-year tale, which will probably end in disaster if the portents littering recent episodes are to be believed. Lead players Sheridan (rear), Londo Mollari (left) and G'Kar look suitably doomed...

The story so far...

Confused? Bewildered? Then read Jim Swallow's quickbite guide.

Orbiting planet Sigma 957 in designated neutral territory is spacestation Babylon 5, a combination of colony, waypoint and Interstellar United Nations. Built by the Earth Alliance, B5 is home to delegations from all the major space powers – the mysterious Vorlons, the imperial Centauri and their former slaves turned arch-foes the Narn, as well as the enigmatic Minbari, and smaller nations like the Drabzi, the Markab and the Pak'Ma'Ra from the imperiously named League of Non-Aligned Worlds.

But all is not well at this convocation of species. Echoes of ill-feeling between castes of the Minbari and EarthForce still exist ten years after the Battle of the Line (the last stand in a war that brought Minbari battlecruisers to Earth's doorstep before they inexplicably surrendered). War between the Narn and Centauri rages across countless star systems. And power groups are on the move inside the Earth Alliance, among them the covert Bureau 13, led by the unseen figure known as "Control," and the sinister Psi-Corps – the telepathic police force whose reach extends further than the Earth authorities realise.

But all these are mere asides next to the greater darkness that looms over the galaxy. From the rim of known space come the night-black creatures called Shadows, a millennia old evil gathering its forces for a single dark purpose – the destruction of all life.

Part soap opera, part space adventure, part war story, part conspiracy drama, *Babylon 5* is an epic tale on the scale of sagas like *Dune* and *Foundation*. Creator, executive producer and main writer JM Straczynski envisages the series as running for a five-year "story arc," with each series acting like a novel in the saga, broken down into chapters/episodes. Season two, collectively known as "The Coming of Shadows," is due to come to a climax this Autumn.

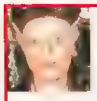
> "JM Straczynski envisages the entire series running for five years..."

Who's who in Babylon 5?

Introducing the good, the bad and the ugly in *Babylon 5*. The problem is working out which is which...

Name: **Talia Winters** (played by Andrea Thompson)
Point of Origin: **Earth**
Occupation: **Psi-Corps' resident telepath on Babylon 5; keeping Garibaldi on tenderhooks.**
Quote: **"Feel differently."** ("Soul Mates")
Notable talents: **Reading minds and flicking coins (and her hair).**
Likes: **Wearing gloves.**
Dislikes: **Her ex-husband and the Psi-Corps.**
Most memorable scene: **Confronting Psi-Cop Bester (Walter Koenig) in "A Race Through Dark Places."**
Separated at birth from: **Deanna Troi**
Future Prospects: **Big Things are afoot with Psi-Corps.**

Name: **G'Kar** (played by Andreas Katsulas)
Point of Origin: **Narn**
Occupation: **Narn Regime Ambassador, mystic, and occasional cook.**
Quote: **"Would you prefer to be conscious or unconscious during the mating?"** ("The Gathering")
Notable talents: **Shouting at Londo, hinting darkly.**
Likes: **His changeable aide Na'Toth and Earth girls.**
Dislikes: **All Centauri.**
Most memorable scene: **His rage after discovering Londo's treachery in "The Coming of Shadows."**
Separated at birth from: **Romulan Comm. Tomolok**
Future Prospects: **The Centauri hate the Narns...**



Name: **Delenn** (played by Mira Furlan)
Point of Origin: **Minbar**
Occupation: **Minbari Ambassador and former Sa'Tai of the Grey Council. Also, the first Minbari to metamorphose.**
Quote: **"Actually, it's oddly relaxing."** ("Soul Mates")
Notable talents: **Having a Minbari philosophical quote for any occasion.**
Likes: **Her *Lost In Space* aide Lennier** (Billy Mumy).
Dislikes: **Militant Minbari.**
Most memorable scene: **The hair scene in "Soul Mates."**
Separated at birth from: **Sinead O'Connor**
Separated at rebirth from: **Björk**
Future Prospects: **A trip in time to Babylon 4.**

Name: **Londo Mollari** (played by Peter Jurasik)
Point of Origin: **Centauri Prime**
Occupation: **Centauri Ambassador and rising star dictator.**
Quote: **"But in purple, I am stunning."** ("The Parliament of Dreams")
Notable talents: **Drinking, gambling and getting Narn colonies vapourised.**
Likes: **Drinking and gambling.**
Dislikes: **Himself, more and more as time goes on.**
Most memorable scene: **Using one of his prehensile Centauri tentacles to cheat at cars in "The Quality of Mercy."**
Separated at birth from: **Sir Les Patterson**
Future Prospects: **Becoming a 23rd century Falstaff...**

Name: **Michael Garibaldi** (played by Jerry Doyle)
Point of Origin: **Earth**
Occupation: **Security Chief of Babylon 5 and one-time chronic alcoholic.**
Quote: **"I don't believe anybody."** ("Hunter, Prey")
Notable talents: **He's a far better shot than anybody on *NYPD Blue*.**
Likes: ***Daffy Duck* cartoons and leering at Talia Winters.**
Dislikes: **Bad guys, crooked cops and revealing more than two emotions.**
Most memorable scene: **The famous motorbike ride with Lennier in "Eyes."**
Separated at birth from: **Bruce Willis**
Future Prospects: **Will he and Talia *ever* get it together?**

Name: **Kosh Naranek** (played by Ardwight Chamberlain)
Point of Origin: **Vorlon (?)**
Occupation: **Vorlon Ambassador and unknown quantity.**
Quote: **"Then the willows must scuttle carefully."** ("Deathwalker")
Notable talents: **The ability to talk incomprehensibly.**
Likes: **Confusing people.**
Dislikes: **The Shadows, speaking intelligibly.**
Most memorable scene: **His two-word answer given to the dying Centauri Emperor's question "How will this end?" in "The Coming of Shadows" – "In fire."**
Separated at birth from: **Darwin the Dolphin**
Future Prospects: **He might take off his encounter suit...**

Name: **John J Sheridan** (played by Bruce Boxleitner)
Point of Origin: **Earth**
Occupation: **Commander of Babylon 5** (when Sinclair left); **former captain of the Earth battlecruiser Agamemnon.**
Quote: **"I'd prefer to be only slightly crazy."** ("Knives")
Notable talents: **Annoying the hell out of Minbari.**
Likes: **Baseball; collecting conspiracy theories.**
Dislikes: **The mystery surrounding his wife's disappearance; teddy bears.**
Most memorable scene: **Confronting Morden in "The Shadow of Z'Ha'Dum."**
Separated at birth from: **Fox Mulder**
Future Prospects: **He's making enemies in high places.**

Name: **Susan Ivanova** (played by Claudia Christian)
Point of Origin: **Earth**
Occupation: **First Officer on Babylon 5, and bossy girl-about-station.**
Quote: **"Not boom today, but boom tomorrow."** ("Signs and Portents")
Notable talents: **Being a babe; quoting Russian philosophy.**
Likes: **Giving orders and being in charge.**
Dislikes: **Psi-Corps, Psi-Cops, psi-scans and diplomacy.**
Most memorable scene: **Having "sex" with the ambassador in "Acts of Sacrifice."**
Separated at birth from: **Sarah Connor**
Future Prospects: **A deep secret even she doesn't know about will soon be revealed...**

Name: **Stephen Franklin** (played by Richard Biggs)
Point of Origin: **Earth**
Occupation: **Babylon 5's head doctor and underground railroad contact.**
Quote: **"Get them down here, Stat."** ("Confessions and Lamentation")
Notable talents: **Can cure a rainy day.**
Likes: **Helping the oppressed/sick/sad/all of the above.**
Dislikes: **Mysteries, and people who don't eat well.**
Most memorable scene: **His reaction to the death of the alien boy in "Believers."**
Separated at birth from: **The cast of *ER*.**
Future Prospects: **More character development outside the MedLab.**

Ivanova missed out on a promotion at the beginning of season two, but wasn't too annoyed – Claudia Christian reckons she's mellowing out...

ONE TOUGH COOKIE!

BABYLON 5 PROVIDES SOME GREAT FEMALE ROLES, CHIEF OF WHICH IS BALLSY, TRAGIC COMMANDER SUSAN IVANOVA, B5'S FIRST OFFICER. PITY SHE'S GOT SUCH BAD DRESS SENSE, CONFIDES ACTRESS CLAUDIA CHRISTIAN TO JANE KILLICK...

Russian-born Commander Susan Ivanova is a tough cookie, admits Claudia Christian, the actress who plays her in *Babylon 5*. A woman who turned to the military when her brother was killed in the Earth-Minbari war, she's a determined individual with a tragic past – her mother chose death rather than join the infamous telepathic police, the Psi-Corps – and Claudia clearly has a lot of affection for her: "I'm very honoured to be portraying a character that little girls can look up to," she says.

Claudia is known as the "Little Brat" on the set, where she displays a fondness for practical jokes and irrepressible good humour. It's a trait that appears to be rubbing off on Ivanova, who's certainly opened up in recent episodes to reveal her vulnerability – and a sense of fun... "I asked Joe Straczynski to write me a comedy scene," she says. "I just didn't expect 'boom shuck-a-lucka-lucka' with the Lamarti..."

She is, of course, referring to the second season episode "Acts of Sacrifice," where Ivanova is told to secure an alliance with the Lamarti race by any means necessary. She's prepared to go along with this until she finds out the alien's traditional way of closing a deal is to have sex. Luckily, this Lamarti knows little about human behaviour, so she cons him into believing human sex is a process of wild dancing and chanting – fully clothed!

"I didn't expect that at all," Claudia laughs. "I originally wanted some comic relief for the character because – Jesus! – her mother dies, her father dies, her brother's dead, she's Russian, she's Jewish, she's uptight, she's militaristic, she's disciplined... So Joe comes up with that whole thing with the Lamarti – and the fans loved it."

THE SOFTENING OF HER CHARACTER HAS GONE HAND-IN-HAND WITH A subtle change in image too. She has, quite literally, been allowed to let her hair down. "The fans saw me in my own hairstyle once, and they really liked it. The problem is I'm in the military, where you have to show your rank, so I try to wear my hair so you can see the badge – except I'm always running around with a gun and stuff, so my hair's everywhere. It's not quite what the real military would be like, but we've allowed ourselves this one little 'mistake' because the fans wanted it."

Ivanova's also been known to wear some flattering dresses when off duty. "Yeah," she laughs. "It's good for the character, because she's not sensual in her job, so it's nice to show different sides of her." It's certainly a relief after that terrible Earth Force uniform – especially, it appears, the trousers...

"They were big, like a diaper," she exclaims, "and I was so embarrassed I'd yank them up. They also make me wear pads so I look busty in the show – the belt's up here, the boobs are down there, and it's basically not attractive. People always say, 'Oh, you look so much better in person,' – no wonder!"

Then again, at least she doesn't have to put up with loads of make-up, like her alien co-stars...

"Oh sure, and not only the aliens. What if I was in a bodysuit like in *Deep Space Nine?* They can't even eat lunch! At least I can hide in my costume!"

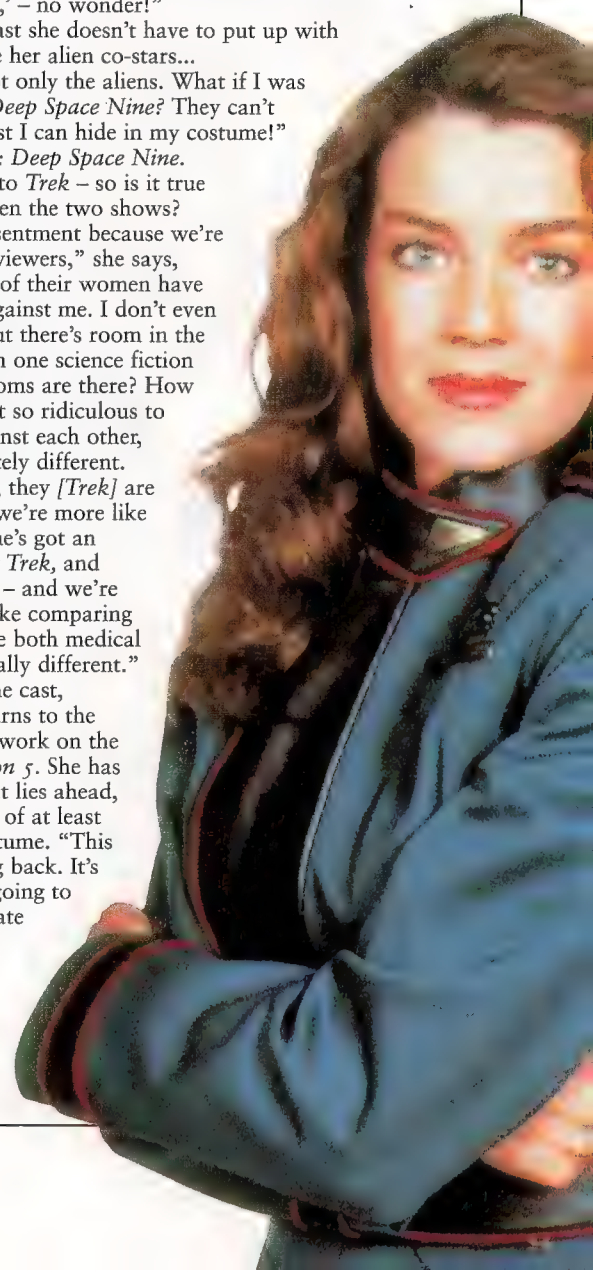
Ah yes, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. *Babylon 5* owes a lot to *Trek* – so is it true there's a rivalry between the two shows?

"There's some resentment because we're stealing a lot of their viewers," she says, "and I've heard some of their women have some sort of rivalry against me. I don't even know these people! But there's room in the universe for more than one science fiction show. How many sitcoms are there? How many dramas? I find it so ridiculous to try and put us up against each other, because we're completely different.

"The way I see it, they *[Trek]* are the Shakespeare, and we're more like Woody Allen. Everyone's got an English accent on *Star Trek*, and they're always serious – and we're doing fart jokes! It's like comparing *MASH* to *ER* – they're both medical shows, but they're totally different."

Like the rest of the cast, Claudia Christian returns to the studio in July to start work on the third season of *Babylon 5*. She has only a vague idea what lies ahead, but she's been assured of at least one thing – a new costume. "This one's about us fighting back. It's very exciting – we're going to become a sovereign state from Earthdom, and that's when we'll re-do the uniforms. Hopefully, I'll be in a flak jacket, like Mad Max... It'll be cool."

"They make me wear pads so I look more busty – all women have to have padded breasts, it's a TV thing..."



It's just another war zone for Yugoslavian actress Mira Furlan, who escaped civil unrest only to become an alien ambassador aboard the strife-torn Babylon 5. Interview by Jane Killick, with reporting by Alex J Geairns.

WAR CHILD

"I had to stop giving interviews in my former country, as both sides would try and twist my words to suit their purpose," notes former Yugoslavian Mira Furlan, as she sips an orange juice, pausing to contemplate the radical change in lifestyle the '90s have brought her. Mira Furlan left her homeland to escape the civil war just over three years ago. "Life had became impossible and dangerous," explains the winner of two Golden Arenas (the Yugoslavian Oscars) for Best Actress, "especially for me, because I was a well-known actor, and people wanted me to choose which national group I belonged to, and I just didn't want to do that."

And so it was that Mira and her husband, director Goran Gajic, moved to New York, leaving friends and family behind. "It was tough at the beginning," she says, but not for long – she soon landed a demanding theatre role, and later auditioned for the pilot of *Babylon 5*. Suddenly, she found herself playing Ambassador Delenn, an alien trying to promote peace between several antagonistic races – a startling parallel to her own experience: "Sometimes it strikes me that the Narns and Centauris are just like the Serbs and Croats – you can translate everything so easily."

But Delenn isn't just another alien from just another science fiction show; she's actually a highly complex, intriguing character.: Generous but secretive; open but mysterious; and – after a physical change in the latest season – both human and alien. "That, I think, is the most interesting thing," she explains, "this combination of toughness, power and intellectual ability, plus softness and vulnerability. It's so rare you get to play a character like that – usually, if it's tough it's only tough, or if it's vulnerable it's this boring feminine thing..."

Delenn's transformation, when the Minbari Ambassador encased herself in a cocoon, hooked the audience at the end of *Babylon 5's* first season. What emerged the following year was something quite different to the Delenn of old – a half-Minbari, half-human hybrid. It lent an extra fascination to the character, and provided a fabulous opportunity for the *Babylon 5* writers, in what Mira amusingly terms as "the episode with the bad hair day."

In "Soul Mates," Delenn calls Ivanova to her quarters in desperation. Her hair is in a terrible tangle, as though she's been dragged through a hedge backwards. "I couldn't connect with it at first," Mira admits. "I thought it really de-mystified Delenn. But then I went to talk to Joe Straczynski and writer Peter David, and in the end it worked well – it's many people's favourite episode."

"Sometimes it strikes me that the Narns and Centauris are just like the Serbs and Croats..."

Have you tried the patented Minbari solution to hair loss? Just pop into a cocoon and a few weeks later, long flowing locks will be yours. "It worked for me!" says Ambassador Delenn, here seen before (above) and after (left).

All the intellectual preparation Delenn had made before becoming more human hadn't quite prepared her for the realities of growing hair – or the reaction of others to her appearance. She became part-human to satisfy a mysterious Minbari prophecy, and to build a bridge of peace between her race and humanity, but at the same time she's become something of an outcast. In a recent episode, for example, she's seen crying when it she's told her appearance is offensive to humans. There's a sense that beneath Delenn's tough exterior lies a lonely woman.

"That's true," says Mira, "My husband and I are without our country, and that's tough. I don't even know how to answer the question 'Where are you from?' I mean, 'former Yugoslavia?' – where's that? So I can completely identify with that in Delenn."

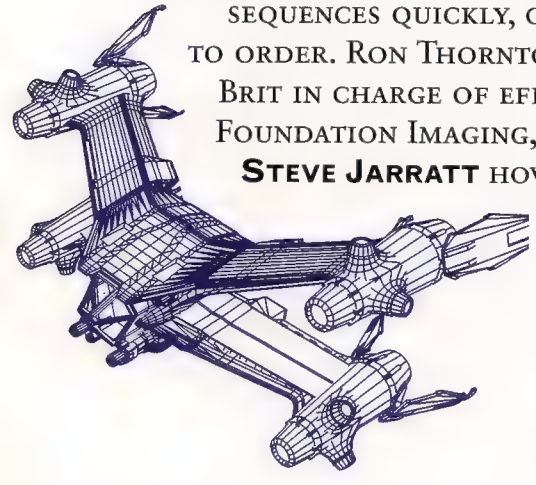
Life on the set, however, is far from lonely. "It's a really good cast. We all come from such different careers, such different places – I mean Jerry Doyle used to be a broker on Wall Street – yet we've all become good friends. Things on the show are symbolic on so many levels."

She has few regrets. "I obviously made a good decision, doing this," she acknowledges, "because the character's changing, and I get so many interesting things to do with her."

The seven-mile-long Babylon 5 spacestation is actually no more than a collection of bits and bytes – the product of heavy-duty processing power and no fewer than 250,000 polygons...

Now *that's* what I call a spaceship!

BABYLON 5 HAS PIONEERED THE USE OF DIGITAL EFFECTS TO PRODUCE SPECTACULAR SFX SEQUENCES QUICKLY, CHEAPLY, AND TO ORDER. RON THORNTON, THE EX-PAT BRIT IN CHARGE OF EFFECTS HOUSE FOUNDATION IMAGING, EXPLAINS TO **STEVE JARRATT** HOW IT'S DONE..



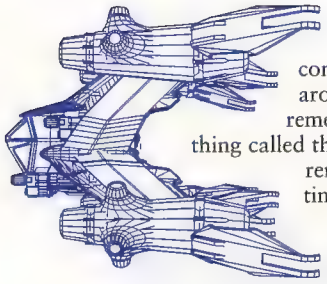
***Babylon 5* may well boast interesting personalities and intriguing plotlines, but shows of this type often live or die by their visual effects. If the seven-mile-long spacestation at any time resembled a seven-inch-long model, *Babylon 5* would suffer an instant credibility crisis.**

The man responsible for the extraterrestrial environs of *Babylon 5* is Ron Thornton, president of Foundation Imaging – an ex-pat Brit now living and working in California. Thornton's interest in visual effects began in Blighty, way back in 1979: "I went to see *Alien* at Leicester Square," he recalls, "and part way through I realised that some lucky bastard actually makes a living building these things. I was on the dole at the time, so I spent my next Government beer voucher on plastic sheet and stuff and I just started making things. After about three months of that, I had a portfolio of photographs that I'd put together of the models, and I went to Matt Irvine at the BBC. He basically gave me a job there and then."

Under Irvine's guidance, Thornton went on to work on *Doctor Who* and *Blake's 7* – fine training for doing things on time and to a tight budget. "The very first job I did was some guns for an episode of *Doctor Who* called 'Warrior's Gate,'" says Thornton, "and I used the money to buy a plane ticket to the US. At the time, *Battlestar Galactica* and *Buck Rogers* were about, and there was a lot of stuff happening over there – I wanted to go round and have a look at these places, and I met a bunch of people. After doing that several times between then and 1984, one of them – David Stipes – offered me a job."

The name might ring a bell. Last year, Stipes won an Emmy award for supervising the effects on the final episode of *Star Trek: TNG*, "All Good Things." Currently, he's filling the same role on *Star Trek: Voyager*. Not a bad start in the business, then...

FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS, THORNTON PERFORMED VARIOUS DUTIES under Stipe's expert guidance – as model-maker, cameraman and animator – but things radically changed with the advent of low-cost



computers. "In 1990 I'd been playing around with computers for a bit," he remembers, "and managed to get hold of a thing called the Video Toaster, which had a 3D rendering package with it. It was the first time such a powerful animation package had been made available to the general public, and I thought I'd try doing a really high-quality spaceship model with it. I'd done it in the real world, and now I was going to try and do it in the virtual world too. The thing was, it worked incredibly well."

Babylon 5 had itself been kicking around Hollywood as a concept since 1988, and Thornton bid for the effects job several times using traditional miniatures. Now, armed with his new computer rendering technology, he won the contract with ease. "I built a rudimentary Babylon 5 and did about a minute of animation, and then suddenly it was, 'Oh, so we can do this!' And it went from there."

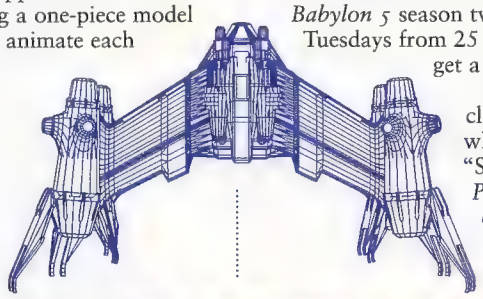
Having proved that the technology was capable of meeting the demands of a weekly show, Thornton set up Foundation Imaging with his partner Paul Bryant. Today, the facility has a team of ten people, working on a range of microcomputers – with not a high-end graphics workstation in sight. Their arsenal consists of a few Commodore Amigas running NewTek's LightWave rendering and modelling package, plus a few Pentiums and Apple Macintoshes – although the bulk of the number-crunching is effected by meaty 275MHz DEC Alphas. Clearly the set-up is a far cry from the multi-million dollar set-up used by ILM, although Thornton admits that the team is looking to buy a Silicon Graphics workstation for its Dynamation particle system.

However, even on the current "low-end" system, we're still talking a lot of computing power. The Babylon 5 spacestation model, for instance, is built to a scale of 1:1 – the computer sees it as a seven-mile-long vessel. In reality, the 3D model consists of a 250,000 polygons, with around 200 different surfaces and 80 different image maps.

Unsurprisingly, then, the shots that take longest to create are the ones involving the Babylon behemoth. "Every time you see Babylon 5, the render times seem to get longer," admits Thornton, "but it's fairly easy to animate. The things that are really difficult are the explosions. They take hours tweaking, simply because you have so many pieces flying off an object, and every single one of them has to be animated. You have to take it bit by bit – even spark by spark – and animate it.

"Most of the explosions we do are all 3D particle systems with fractal generated gases and stuff like that. What happens is that at the point of the explosion, the ship changes from being a one-piece model to being a model which is broken up, and then we animate each individual piece flying away."

While this sounds horribly fiddly, one of the biggest advantages to working in the digital domain, Thornton explains, is logistical: "Say you spend about $5,000 and build yourself a model Babylon 5 – you've then got one model. You can only put it on one soundstage, or one motion control stage, and shoot it. Whereas once we've got a computer model of Babylon 5, every single animator in this place can be doing a shot with Babylon 5 in it – the equivalent of having ten models. Plus, what you see on your monitor screen is what you're going to get – because we composite it all at once, with the whole image done in one pass."



"I miss having a big fucking model of Babylon 5 sitting on my desk... *That's* the downside..."

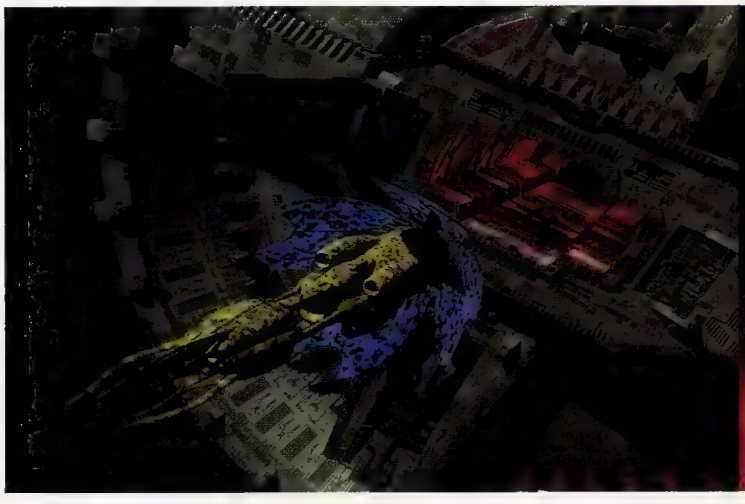
Ron Thornton, Foundation Imaging

MUCH AS COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY IS A REVOLUTIONISING THE ART, traditional bluescreen effects are still useful in scenes which are difficult to model – one sequence featuring a bluescreen teddy bear floating ominously through space, for example, actually uses a real toy (the one given to show creator J Michael Straczynski by writer Peter David – see The SFX interview this issue, starting on page 38 – to be precise). Bluescreen is also used for compositing different elements. Video Toaster stuff is being mixed so often with bluescreen work, in fact, that Foundation Imaging is about to move into a new facility incorporating a 3,000 square foot bluescreen stage, which it'll use to shoot live action for compositing into virtual sets.

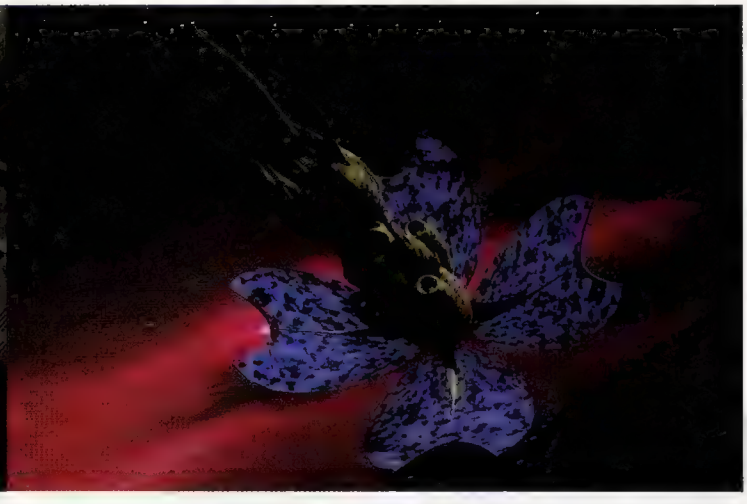
So digital effects are good, they're fast, they're cheap, and they're flexible. But what are the drawbacks? "I miss having a big fucking model of Babylon 5 sitting on my desk!" complains Thornton. "It just gets really frustrating – we've got a nice foyer to the office with nothing in it!"

Foundation Imaging has just put the finishing touches to the last episode of the second series of *Babylon 5*, the "big season finale." But when pressed on the show going out with a bang, Thornton's tone takes a worrying edge. "It's kind of going out on a downer, actually – but I can't tell you much more about it." Damn. Still, at least we'll find out what he's on about before the Americans – the last four episodes of *Babylon 5* season two will be broadcast by Channel 4 on four Tuesdays from 25 July, a good three months before the same shows get a Stateside airing.

My time with Ron Thornton is drawing to a close, so before we part, I quickly ask who (or what) impresses him most these days, effects-wise? "Stephen Begg and Bill Pearson's work on *Space Precinct*..." he replies. "Some of their motion control and miniature work is fabulous. The trouble is, you have to put you brain in 'park,' because the show is so awful..."



A Vorlon ship enters Babylon 5. The crap-covered detail of the *Star Wars* vessels is replicated by hundreds of image maps plotted onto the surface of the behemoth station.



During spaceflight, the Vorlon craft opens its petal-like fins. The bright colour schemes of the Babylon 5 craft are influenced by the Gerry Anderson shows of Ron Thornton's youth.

Star Fury

BABYLON 5'S FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE IS THIS TOUGH, COMPLETELY COMPUTER-RENDERED, SPACE FIGHTER...

The Star Fury is *Babylon 5's* version of *Star Wars'* X-Wing, *The Last Starfighter's* Gunfire, or the Vipers from *Battlestar Galactica* – a tough, single-seat space fighter, designed to move fast, dogfight well, and pack a big punch. There are 28 Star Furies ready to launch from Babylon 5 at any one time, seven from each of four launch bays, but in the unlikely event that they don't prove up to the job, there are at least another 28 ships on board that can be moved into launch position to help out. "The Star Furies are organised in wings of seven ships, with names like 'Alpha Wing,'" reveals creator Ron Thornton of Foundation Imaging, "although I think Joe Straczynski just makes the names up as he goes along!"

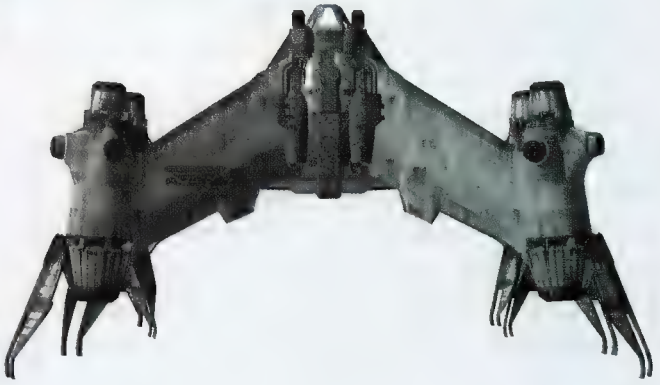
THE COCKPIT

THE STAR FURY IS A SINGLE-SEAT FIGHTER PILOTED BY A LONE STARPILOT. ***RON THORNTON:*** "THE SHIPS USUALLY HAVE DARK PANES, SO YOU CAN'T SEE THE PILOT INSIDE, ALTHOUGH FOR MEDIUM CLOSE-UPS WE RENDER A SMALL HUMAN BEING INSIDE THE SHIP, AND FOR SOME CLOSE-UP SHOTS WE ACTUALLY SHOOT AN ACTOR INSIDE A COCKPIT SET, THEN DROP THAT INTO THE FIGHTER. SEPARATE OVER-THE-SHOULDER SHOTS INCORPORATE A HELMET AND UPPER BODY OF A PILOT RENDERED INSIDE A VIRTUAL COCKPIT, WHICH IS THEN COMPOSITED INTO A PRE-RENDERED BACKGROUND, SO IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE INSIDE THE SHIP LOOKING OUT. WE'RE GOING TO TRY TO MAKE ALL OF THIS BETTER-LOOKING FOR SEASON THREE."

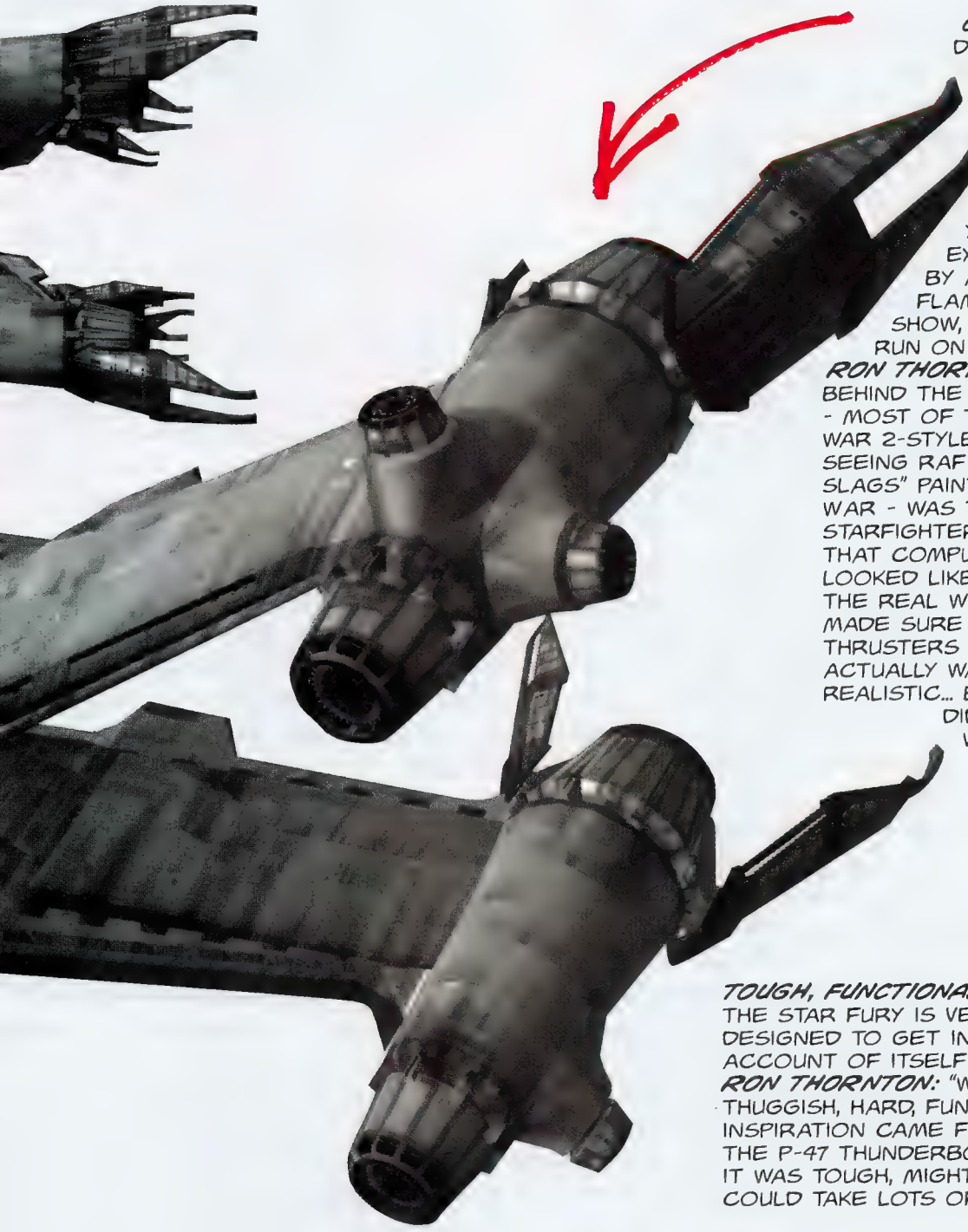
BIG GUNS

NO SELF-RESPECTING SPACESHIP IS COMPLETE WITHOUT A DECENT ARSENAL. THE STAR FURY BOASTS TWO FORWARD-FIRING COPELAND PULSE CANNONS (NAMED AFTER A PRODUCER ON THE SHOW!) UNDERNEATH THE COCKPIT, AND ANOTHER TWO MOUNTED ON THE TOP WING, ABOVE THE PILOT. ***RON THORNTON:*** "THEY'RE NICE, DUMPY, BUSINESS-LIKE GUNS, THOUGH WE'VE YET TO USE THE TOP ONES MUCH. WE'RE JUST TOO LAZY TO ANIMATE THEM! ACTUALLY, AT ONE POINT IN SEASON THREE THEY GET A NEW, FASTER AND MORE HEAVILY ARMED VERSION OF THE STAR FURY DELIVERED TO BABYLON 5. THE THING IS, THOUGH, IT'S PLAGUED WITH PROBLEMS, AND TURNS OUT TO BE A DISAPPOINTMENT. WE'VE GOT A TWO-SEAT MODEL TOO, AND ONE WITH A TAIL SECTION AND NEW COCKPIT THAT CAN GO INTO A PLANET'S ATMOSPHERE. WE HAVEN'T USED THOSE YET, BUT MAYBE LATER ON IN SEASON THREE, EH?"

The reason the Star Fury is designed in this cross shape is to move the moment of thrust away from the ship's centre of gravity. "The ship models we use are constructed from around 20,000 polygons and 15 image maps," says Ron Thornton. "They're meant to be about ten metres long by 14 metres across in the TV show."



Foundation Imaging has three different versions of the Star Fury model it uses in the show – one for long shots, one for close-ups, and one for extreme close-ups. "It's a good design," says Ron Thornton, "but it's not actually my favourite ship in *B5*. I prefer the Minbari cruiser, which is fairly vertical looking, like a giant butterfly."



ONE OF FOUR ENGINES

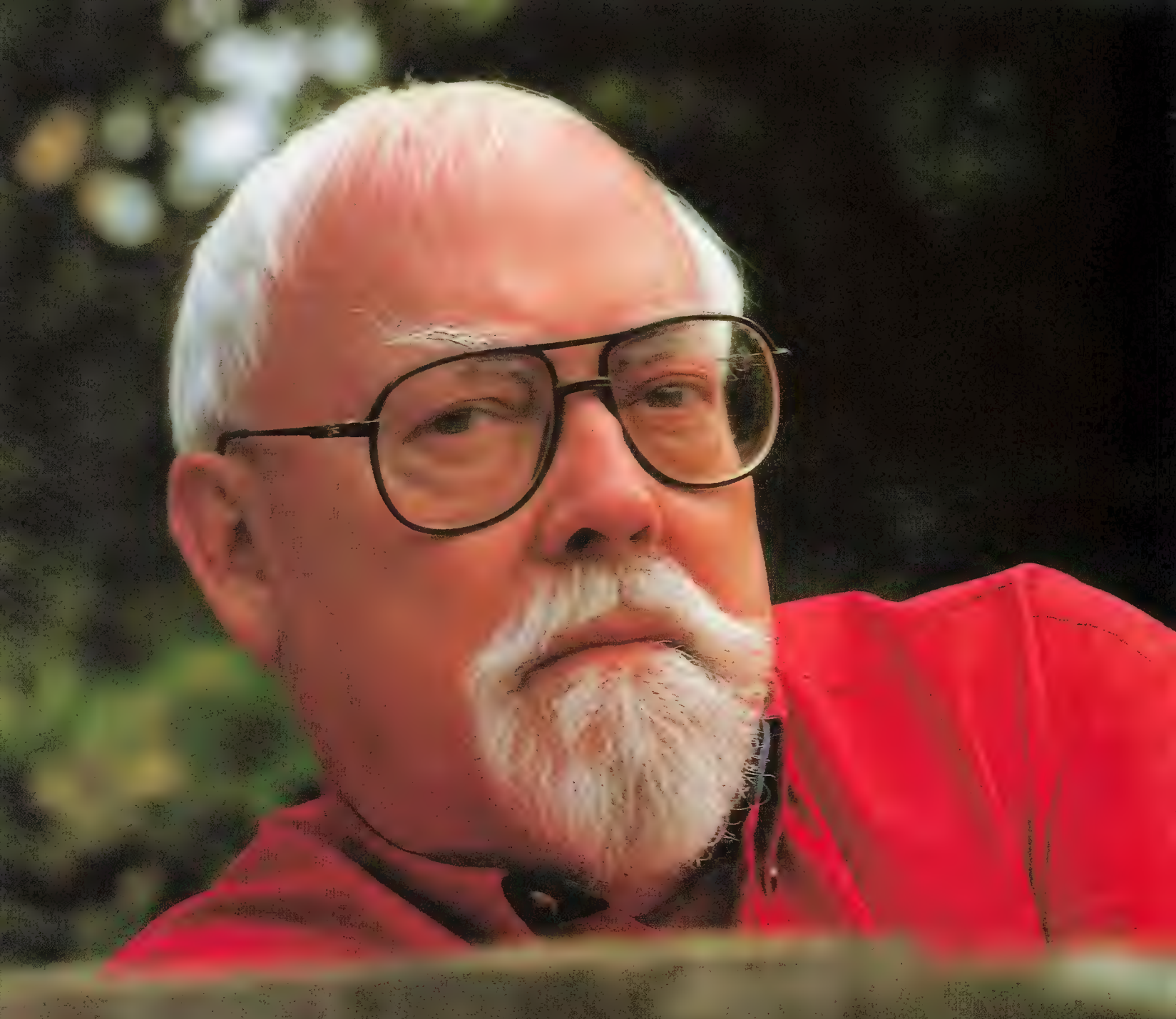
DESIGNED SO IT WOULD ACTUALLY WORK AS A MANOEUVRABLE SPACECRAFT IN THE REAL WORLD, THE STAR FURY BOASTS FOUR ENGINES, WITH DIRECTIONAL FINS AT THE REAR AND THRUSTERS FOR PITCH AND YAW CONTROL. THE ENGINE'S EXHAUST FLUMES ARE PRODUCED BY A LUMINOUS, FRACTAL-BASED FLAME OBJECT, ALTHOUGH IN THE SHOW, THE ENGINES ARE MEANT TO RUN ON VAPOURISED SOLID PROPELLANT.

RON THORNTON: "THE MAIN INSPIRATION BEHIND THE SHIP, APART FROM OLD PLANES - MOST OF THE STAR FURYS HAVE WORLD WAR 2-STYLE NOSE ART, PARTLY INSPIRED BY SEEING RAF TORNADOS WITH "THE FAT SLAGS" PAINTED ON THE FRONT IN THE GULF WAR - WAS THE GUNSTAR FROM "THE LAST STARFIGHTER," BECAUSE NOT ONLY WAS THAT COMPUTER-GENERATED, BUT IT LOOKED LIKE IT MIGHT ACTUALLY WORK IN THE REAL WORLD. DESIGNER RON COBB HAD MADE SURE IT HAD ALL THE RIGHT LITTLE THRUSTERS AND EVERYTHING ON IT, AND ACTUALLY WANTED IT TO BE EVEN MORE REALISTIC... BUT THE PRODUCERS, SADLY, DIDN'T UNDERSTAND AND WOULDN'T LET HIM."

TOUGH, FUNCTIONAL DESIGN

THE STAR FURY IS VERY MUCH A NO-FRILLS SHIP, DESIGNED TO GET IN FAST, AND GIVE A GOOD ACCOUNT OF ITSELF ONCE IT ARRIVES.

RON THORNTON: "WE DESIGNED IT TO LOOK THUGGISH, HARD, FUNCTIONAL, EVEN DUMPY. OUR INSPIRATION CAME FROM WORLD WAR 2 PLANES LIKE THE P-47 THUNDERBOLT. WE WANTED IT TO LOOK LIKE IT WAS TOUGH, MIGHT BE A HANDFUL TO FLY, BUT COULD TAKE LOTS OF HITS AND KEEP ON GOING."



"I've just sold another Rat novel – *The Stainless Steel Rat Goes to Hell.* It's a theological thriller that takes place shortly after *Stainless Steel Rat for President.* I see the series going on for ever... People keep asking me to bring back the character!"

MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM!
FOR A GENUINE SCIENCE FICTION LEGEND

harry, the galactic hero

COMICS ARTIST, SF EDITOR, STAINLESS STEEL RAT CREATOR AND ESPERANTO AMBASSADOR, HARRY MAXWELL HARRISON IS ONE OF THE GREAT NAMES IN SCIENCE FICTION. HE'S BEEN WRITING SINCE 1951 AND, AS **MJ SIMPSON** DISCOVERED, SHOWS NO SIGN OF STOPPING YET...

Born in Connecticut in 1925, Harry Harrison has lived in Ireland for the last 20 years, and produced a steady stream of novels, short stories and anthologies. His most popular creation is undoubtedly "Slippery" Jim diGriz, the Stainless Steel Rat, whose debut in legendary science fiction anthology magazine *Astounding* in 1957 was expanded into a novel four years later, and has so far spawned five sequels and two prequels. Harry is also the author of the *Deathworld* trilogy, the *To the Stars* trilogy, the *West of Eden* trilogy and the *Bill, the Galactic Hero* series.

But wait, there's more. To this list you should add such classics as *Star-Smashers of the Galaxy Rangers, The Technicolor Time Machine, Make Room! Make Room!* (on which the film *Soylent Green* was based), *Plague from Space,* and *A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!,* plus thrillers like *The QE2 Is Missing* and non-fiction such as *Mechanismo* and *Great Balls of Fire.* Clearly, Harry Harrison is one of the most popular and prolific SF authors in the business.

Soylent Green aside, his only forays into TV/radio SF have been some excellent Radio 4 adaptations of *Time Machine, Star-Smashers* and *Bill, the Galactic Hero,* so when I spoke with him at Sol III in Blackpool earlier this year, my first question, quite naturally, was what on Earth was he doing attending a *Star Trek* convention?

"They invited me to be Guest of Honour," he smiles. "It's sometimes hard to get *Star Trek* people, so by having a big name science fiction writer too they seem to please everybody. It pleases the Trekkies and pleases the writers. We get a weekend holiday and help to push our books."

You've done this before then? "Oh yes. I went to a New York *Star Trek* con about 15 years ago. There were 25,000 Trekkies, and a lot of big name science fiction writers too – Isaac Asimov, Harlan Ellison, Gordy Dickson, Barry Malzberg, Hal Clement, Harry Stubbs – who did interviews in a separate room from the actors. It's a kind of an acknowledgement that *Star Trek* came from science fiction, and SF authors have something to offer.

"Actually, at the opening ceremony to Sol III, I was backstage with some *Star Trek* actors, and we were introduced one by one. When I came on it was rapturous applause. 'Oh!' I said, 'I'm glad some of you out there still read!', and they all heard that, because all through the con people have been saying 'I read, Mr Harrison! I read your books!'"

Harry Harrison's most famous creation, The Stainless Steel Rat, appeared a number of times in *2000AD*, with art by *Judge Dredd* co-creator Carlos Ezquerra.

Things like *Star Trek* seem to be a good way of introducing people to SF. They get into *Star Trek,* read the James Blish novelisations, then see something else by James Blish...

"Very much so," he agrees. "My *Stainless Steel Rat* books sell very well everywhere, but about 15 years ago they serialised some of them in *2000AD*. They came second in the readers' poll – never quite beating *Judge Dredd* – but as the years went by, I started meeting comics fans at conventions who went to a bookshop to buy a comic book and saw *The Stainless Steel Rat* novel on the shelf. I've built a whole fandom out there from the comics, among other things."

And he's got a point. After all, I know for a fact that our own editor, Matt Bielby, read his first *Rat* book after seeing one of the serialisations in *2000AD*. So how did the comic thing come about?

"They approached me," he explains, matter-of-factly. "They must have had some science fiction fans on staff. Actually, I used to draw and write comics – I was a comic artist to begin with, so it was like my return to comics. I helped lay out the character and the series, and helped in the adaptation from book to comics – something no other science fiction writer would be able to do. And we got this good artist, Carlos Ezquerra, to do it, which I was very happy about."

WE GO BACK A BIT IN THE CONVERSATION... You worked for the great science fiction editor Damon Knight in the '40s, didn't you?

"Yes, I did illustrations for his magazine, *Worlds Beyond*. I also did book jackets, and *Galaxy* magazine, but my main work was comics at the time. Wally Wood [a great comic artist] and I went to art school together. We did Westerns first, then science fiction. We weren't much involved with horror; I did maybe one story... I did the Jeff Hawke strip for a while for Sid Jordan. They were, I think, the first science fiction comics ever done."

Your first published story was, I believe, "Rock Diver..."

"Yes," he smiles. "That was for Damon Knight, when I was illustrating *Worlds Beyond*. I was ill, I couldn't draw, but I had this story in my mind. I'd been a fan all my life – I knew all the science fiction writers because I was illustrating for them – so I

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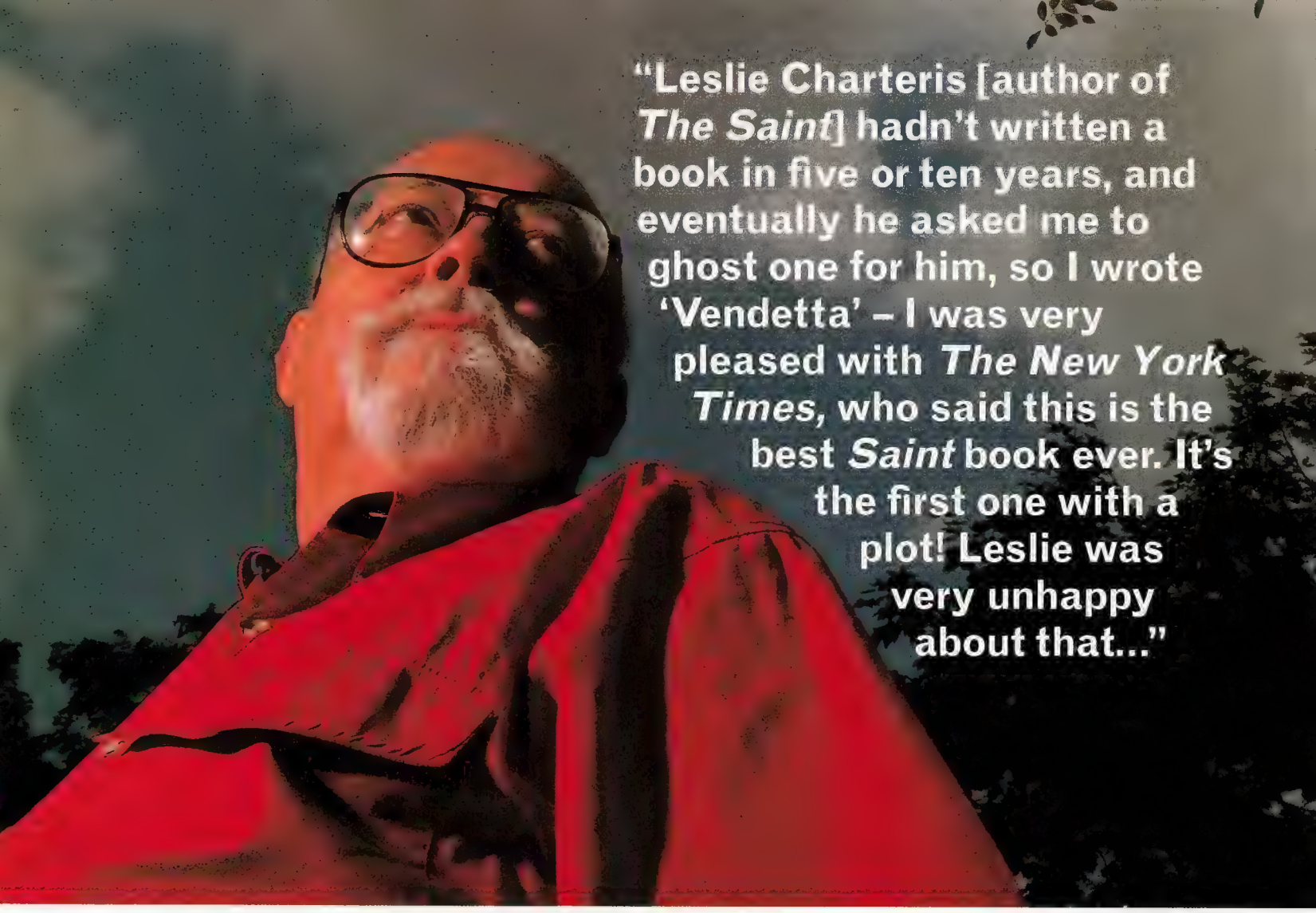

"Leslie Charteris [author of *The Saint*] hadn't written a book in five or ten years, and eventually he asked me to ghost one for him, so I wrote 'Vendetta' – I was very pleased with *The New York Times*, who said this is the best *Saint* book ever. It's the first one with a plot! Leslie was very unhappy about that..."

said: 'Damon, what should I do with this?' He said: 'I'll buy it, but it's a rotten title.' So he changed it from *I Walk Through Rocks* to *Rock Diver,* and gave me $50. I sold a few more stories after that, then the comics went bust and I ended up editing pulp magazines. I found I enjoyed writing more than I did art – and was much better at it – so eventually I decided to write a novel. I quit, went to Mexico and started on *Deathworld*. I took it over to Italy, and finished it in the States."

Harry's famous for a number of things, beyond writing SF – one of the most unusual being a love of the little-used "international" language Esperanto. Did this come from all his travelling, I wonder.

"No, it actually came about before that. It's in my blood, I suppose. In the army, we had a lecture about Esperanto, and I studied and learned to read and write it. After the war, I went back to New York and learned to speak it too."

It's a bit ironic that Esperanto, which was meant to be the leading international language, has now been overtaken in terms of actual speakers by Klingon, isn't it?

He laughs. "What appals me about Klingon is that it's the hardest language to learn, the one with the most difficult grammar, whereas Esperanto is the easiest, has the most regular grammar. You can learn to read and write it in an hour and a half."

I guess it just hasn't caught people's imaginations like Klingon has...

"Yes, but Esperanto is still a great, glorious thing. I'm happy to say that my science fiction has made me an honorary patron of the World Movement. They called me up and said, 'Would you be an honorary patron?' so I said, 'What do I have to do?' And they said, 'You have to speak Esperanto and be world-famous,' and I said, 'That's me!' I'm the only science fiction writer they have.

"In fact," he continues, "the *Stainless Steel Rat* books have brought thousands of new members in. They had an ad on the back page – normally the translator puts in 'The Rat speaks Esperanto. Why don't you?', and then they put the address of the local organisation. At one point, 80% of all the enquiries in America were from the *Rat* books. Then they translated the *Rat* books into Russian, and the translator translated the last page with the American address on it! So the Americans got hundreds of requests about Esperanto – in Russian! Just now a group of international enthusiasts have done an Esperanto translation of the first book, and I've done an introduction for it. That'll be coming out soon."

After 40 years of writing fiction you get to do some pretty weird things, but something that's always struck me as being odd – for Harry at least – is his work on *The Saint*. At one point, for instance, he ghosted all sorts of things for Leslie Charteris...

"Leslie Charteris had a *Saint* comic," he explains, "and I was writing scripts for that for a couple of years. The comics were being translated into French and turned into novels – there are more *Saint* novels in French than in English! When they killed the comic I just did outlines of stories, and the French continued to turn them into books. I didn't know at the time, but Charteris hadn't written a book in five or ten years, and eventually he asked me to ghost one for him, so I wrote 'Vendetta.' That's all mine – every single word of it. I was very pleased with *The New York Times,* who said this is the best *Saint* book ever. It's the first one with a plot! Leslie was very unhappy about that..."

The original *Bill, the Galactic Hero* was written quite some time ago (1964-5), and was very good, but in the late '80s you started bringing out a series of co-written sequels which weren't very well received...

"Well, there's a good reason for that," he laughs. "They were pretty bad. Basically, I was tricked into it. There's a big subversive movement in science fiction of military science fiction. Baen Books publishes nothing but military – I call it the pornography of war. I loathe it – I've been anti-war since year one. I'd written *Bill, the Galactic Hero,* which is my anti-war novel, and a publisher came to me and said: 'There's all this war stuff – why don't you do an anti-war series?' and talked me into it. I did one myself – *Bill, the Galactic Hero, on the Planet of Robot Slaves* – which was a lot of fun, but I wasn't happy with the rest of the books. They sold to juveniles – some kid in high school who sees my name on it and doesn't know the difference."

Of all the books you've written, which ones are you proudest of?

"That's like asking 'Which of your children do you like the best?' The answer I

always say is 'the next book,' because the next one is always perfect. There's a book I'm working on now, finishing off the *Hammer and the Cross* trilogy, and I've just sold another *Rat* novel – *The Stainless Steel Rat goes to Hell.* It's a theological thriller that takes place a shortly after *The Stainless Steel Rat for President.* I see the series going on for ever – the Stainless Steel Rat as an old age pensioner. People keep asking me to bring back the character."

HARRY HARRISON MAY BE A WRITER, BUT he's got a history of editing behind him too. He's co-edited a lot of stuff with Brian Aldiss, for instance. How did that came about? They're quite different writers, after all...

"We met at the Worldcon in '57," he recalls, "but he doesn't remember it. I'd read his work and liked it very much, and it turned out he had read my work and liked it as well. He was literary editor of *The Oxford Mail,* a working critic at the time. The thing was, *Starship Troopers* had just been published, and there'd been a tremendous amount of rubbish written about it – but he wrote a review that was literary and intelligent. We started corresponding, and worked up the idea of doing the first little magazine of science fiction criticism, which we did. We published two issues.

"Later on we started collaborating on a novel, but we're very different writers, as you well know, and realised we were never going to finish it. But we found that although we're disparate writers, we agree completely critically. In fact, when we started collaborating on science fiction anthologies we never disagreed. If one writer doesn't like the story we throw it out – we never argue about it. We've only actually argued two or three times out of 50 anthologies. We get along well critically and socially. One year we did six anthologies together!"

You did a series of SF anthologies – *Decade: The 1940s,* etc – but it stopped around the '60s. Are we ever going to see the later ones?

"That was all back in the '70s. We started with the '40s, the Golden Age, which I think is the best stuff – great. And then we did the '50s – great – and the '60s – great. We were now in 1975 or something, so we couldn't do the '70s. So we said, 'We'll go back and do the 1930s.' And we looked, and it was such awful rubbish! We grew up with this shit, but really you can't publish it today. It was fun when you were five years old, it opened up your life, but you go back and read it now and it's rubbish! So we just killed the series. We did *The Year's Best* for eight years too [1967-75], which was just as much fun."

With all the editing Harry's done, he must have come across a lot of good new writers in his time. Are there any that stand out?

"Oh yes. When I had the time to do editing I published the first stories of between 10-15 different writers. I published the first David Gerrold story, the first by James Tiptree Jr. [pseudonym of female writer Alice Sheldon]. David Gerrold went on to write *The Trouble With Tribbles* – everyone's carrying a damn tribble around nowadays, so maybe I was right! James Tiptree Jr went on to become one of the most important writers in science fiction, before she died. I published the first story by Tom Scortia – he went on to write *The Towering Inferno.*"

You obviously read a lot. Who do you read for fun?

"Not necessarily science fiction any more," he reveals, surprisingly. "Older writers I've always read and enjoyed are either not writing much or dead. I'll read any new writer if they're pointed out to me, but there's so much crap being published – fantasy trilogies, and that sort of thing – you don't want to read them. I read a lot of mainstream novels and non-fiction."

So do you think we'll ever see SF shortlisted for the Booker prize?

"Brian Aldiss tried – he was on the Booker committee and put up Michael Moorcock's *Gloriana,* but they were offended that anyone liked it. Kingsley Amis, who's a big fan of science fiction, says the attitude is 'If it's good, it can't be science fiction, and if it's science fiction, it can't be good.' The mainstream critics just won't admit it. They will not allow us to say that, for instance, *Brave New World* is science fiction."

I suppose we get our revenge in that Booker Prize novels hardly sell that much, whereas your novels do amazingly well...

"Well, that's true. Most Booker prize things'll sell maybe 3,000-4,000 copies in hardback, another 2,000 in paperback, and that's the end of them."

And that, I guess, is the difference...

Harry will be attending Intersection in August, and will be a Guest of Honour at Novacon 25 in November. For more details, see Live!, page 104. Thanks to Sol III for helping to arrange this interview.

Stainless Steel Writer

THE SFX GUIDE TO THE BEST OF HARRY HARRISON

With over 50 novels and collections to his name, we can only skim the surface of the Harry Harrison canon. But as well as the books listed here, we recommend the following: The *West of Eden* trilogy, which features primitive humans battling intelligent dinosaurs; *The Men from PIG and ROBOT,* two terrific juvenile novellas; *Two Tales and Eight Tomorrows,* a collection of ten shorts, including the spooky "The Streets of Ashkelon"; and *A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!*

Bill, The Galactic Hero (1965)

Drafted into the USAAF in 1943, Harry became a gunnery instructor and soon developed a deep loathing of all things military. This is a glorious satire of the stupidity of war in which a simple country lad is turned into a lethal, interstellar fighting machine with two right arms. Terry Pratchett considers this *Forrest-Gump*-meets-*Starship-Troopers* romp to be "the funniest SF novel ever written." (NB: Ignore all the sequels; even the co-authorship of Robert Sheckley on one title couldn't save the lame cash-ins.)

The Deathworld trilogy (1960-68)

Harry's first novel centred on Jason din Alt's attempts to discover why the planet Pyrrus is so completely inhospitable, and returns to that theme in the imaginatively named *Deathworld 2 (nee The Ethical Engineer)* and *Deathworld 3,* while exploring other even less friendly planets. Exciting and well-crafted SF.

Make Room! Make Room! (1966)

One of Harry's most ambitious books, this study of an over-populated world took five years to research and write, long before there was any popular awareness of the problem, and a good three year's before Brunner's *Stand On Zanzibar.* In 1973, *MR!MR!* was "filmed" as *Soylent Green,* directed by Richard Fleischer and starring Charlton Heston and Edward G Robinson. Very little of the book actually made it to the screenplay.

Plague From Space (1965)

Certain commentators have pointed out the similarities between this *Outbreak*-esque tale of deadly extra-terrestrial viral infection and a certain Michael Crichton novel. SFX will be judicious and say that the one is as good as t'other, but notes that Harrison's novel predates *The Andromeda Strain* by four years.

The Stainless Steel Rat series (1961-)

Not-quite-reformed-criminal-turned-secret-agent James Bolivar diGriz was created in 1957, when Harry was practising narrative hooks and wrote one that intrigued him so much he had to finish the story (published in *Astounding* that year). He expanded this into a novel in '61, and followed up by writing *The SSR's Revenge* ('70), The *SSR Saves the World* ('72), *The SSR Wants You!* ('78), and T*he SSR for President* ('82). A series of prequels kicked off in '85 with *A SSR is Born,* followed by *The SSR Gets Drafted* ('87) and The *SSR Sings the Blues* ('95). There is also a *Rat* short story in the 1993 collection *Stainless Steel Visions,* with more tales to come. All are great.

Star-Smashers of the Galaxy Rangers (1973)

An extremely broad parody of EE "Doc" Smith-style space opera. Some all-American kids develop a "cheddite projector," a cheese-powered device which sends an airliner they've borrowed to an alien planet (!). The ugly BEMs turn out to be intelligent; the hunky heroes turn out to be gay; and the whole one enormous cheek/tongue interface.

"...AND THEN THE SCREAMING STARTS..."

ALIEN WAR IN LONDON IS ONE OF THE CAPITAL'S TOP TOURIST ATTRACTIONS – A LIVE ACTION EXPERIENCE BASED ON THE FILM ALIENS, AND FEATURING MOVIE-QUALITY SPECIAL EFFECTS. EVERY DAY, HUNDREDS OF TOURISTS PAY GOOD MONEY TO BE SHOUTED AT, PUSHED AROUND, AND GENERALLY SCARED OUT OF THEIR WITS. **CHRIS HULME** SIGNED UP FOR A DAY WITH THE COLONIAL MARINES...

Two colonial marines are screaming orders, but in the commotion it's hard to concentrate on what they're saying. "Back up, back up, get down!" – something like that. What I do know is that 12 people have just run down a dimly-lit corridor and are crowding into a recess. A symphony of Klaxons, hissing gas-vents and pulsing "woo" sounds urge us on.

A couple of people look genuinely anxious. Given half a chance, they'd gladly rush out through the emergency exit, down the road, and keep on going until the panic's subsided. The others mostly grin nervously, their eyes gingerly exploring their surroundings. There's a very real fear of knocking into something hard in this maze of metal corridors – or worse, bumping into or talking to someone in the gaggle of strangers around you. How embarrassing. After all, just a few moments ago we were all sensible adults out in the not-so-sensible real world...

The lights cut out. We're left standing in darkness. I crouch down and squint, hoping for a glimpse of the beast. Sure enough, a large silhouette moves swiftly through the gloom...

Then it all goes mad. There's an explosion of gunfire and screaming, and a seven foot tall xenomorph springs up from the floor. It seems to wear its skeleton on the outside of its black body. Its massive head is shaped like a slug, horns jut from its back, and there's a long, bony tail. The alien darts back and forwards like a cobra. A flickering strobe light lends its movements animal-like credibility.

Around me, tourists are reeling backwards in horror, eyes popping, arms pushing each other out of the way – all semblance of natural reserve well and truly nuked. I am – for the day

Rookie Colonial Marine Chris Hulme – seen here before it all goes horribly pear-shaped for the tourists...

– a private in the Colonial Marine Corps at Alien War, and it's my duty to protect these people. Drawing my puny pistol from its holster, I take aim at the raging creature. My fellow grunts blaze away with pulse rifles. Behind me, someone's shouting and waving: "Move, move, move!" I know it's all fake – I was having coffee with that alien half an hour earlier – but I'm as carried away as the next man.

ALIEN WAR OPENED AT LONDON'S TROCADERO shopping centre in October 1993. As tourist attractions go, it's pretty unique for London, although there are similar live action adventures operating in the States. What makes it SFX territory, of course, is that it's been inspired by the film *Aliens,* which is arguably the greatest SF/horror movie of all time.

The basic idea is that you're visiting a Colonial Marine base where you can see aliens in captivity. As science officer Ash gurgled in the original movie, this is one lifeform well worth observing – "A survivor, unclouded by conscience, remorse or delusions of morality." Well worth observing, that is, provided there's a good solid wall between you and it.

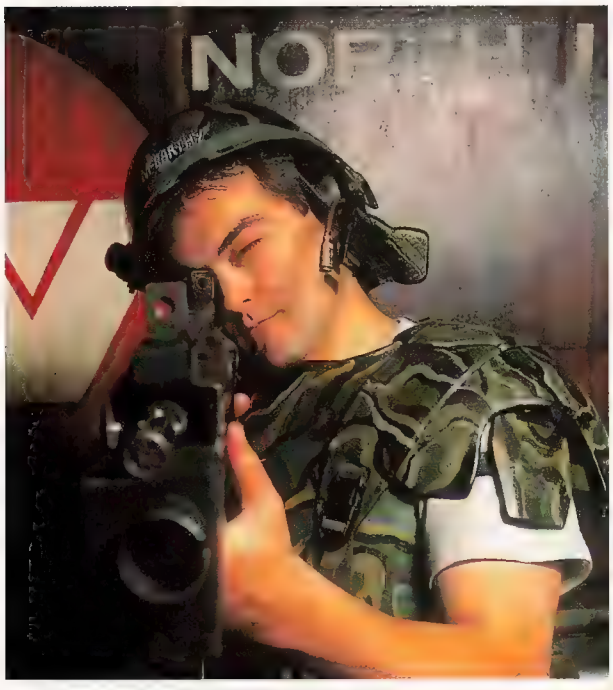
Of course, it all goes wrong. Predictably, as you're waiting to go inside, two marines rush forwards to say the aliens have escaped, and you have to leg it to an Emergency Escape Vehicle (EEV) on the other side of the base. And so the nightmare begins.

The attraction was created by Gary Gilles, a swimming instructor, and John Gorman, a public relations executive, who hit upon the idea after attending an SF convention.They got approval from 20th Century Fox to mimic the sets, costumes and creatures from *Aliens,* and – after knocking together a set under a Glasgow railway arch – opened for business in 1992.

The attraction proved so popular that Gillies and Gorman soon chased down the finance to relocate to London. The new Alien War was to be on a much bigger scale, and use far more sophisticated effects. Sigourney Weaver (Ripley), Lance Henrikson (Bishop), Carrie Henn (Newt) and Rico Ross (Private "He don't like the corn bread either" Frost) were among the *Aliens* cast members who attended the glittering opening ceremony.

Sadly, as in all three *Alien* films, everything that could go wrong did. The lighting system wasn't up and running in time, so a supposedly gloomy, murky and appropriately atmospheric set ended up being lit by strip lights. Sound effects run by a central computer (called Mother, naturally) were triggered in the wrong order too, meaning marines went into battle with silent guns. "We just weren't ready," admits Matt Roper, media relations manager. Gillies and Gorman are, however, no longer

Chris demonstrates a marine pulse rifle – the team only have two between them, which probably explains why not *all* of the tourists survive...



Near the end of the ride, and just when you think it's safe to relax, an alien pops into the EEV and causes all manner of merry panic. Cue screaming...

Mark Chawner (left), 24, and Nick Russell, 22, are just two of the eight fully-suited "aliens" used in Alien War. "I just love it when I get a good group," admits Mark. "People screaming – you can really get into the part..."

"We've had people running out of here screaming, wetting themselves, crying, hyper-ventilating, vomiting – you name it."

Nick Russell, alien

(Far left) One of Giger's horrors leaps out, and two marines are hard pressed to keep it at bay.

(Left) Looking hard is just the half of it...

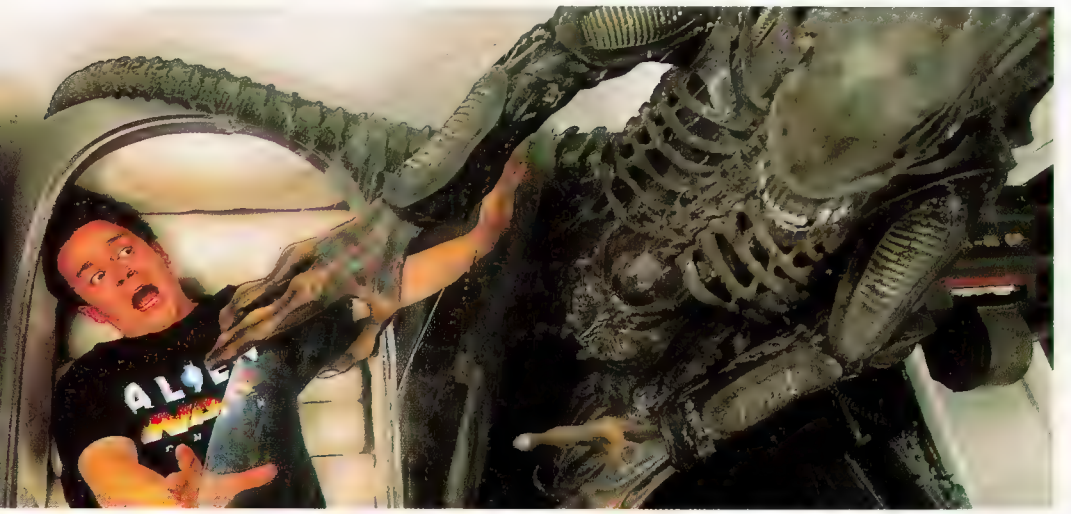
connected with the project. Last November, Sian Trading Ltd – a company that operates Quasar role-playing centres – took over the operation. The new owners politely hedge around the subject of how they came to acquire the attraction, but what seems clear is that Gillies and Gorman left reluctantly.

Nevertheless, the new owners want to open Alien War centres elsewhere too, providing they can build London into a genuine success. At the moment, they employ eight marines and eight aliens at their site at the Trocadero near Piccadilly Circus, as well as two special effects designers, and a handful of management types. It's a young team – mostly twentysomethings, largely recruited from the fringes of the film and television world.

The cast was, in the main, hired from an audition held at London's Planet Hollywood restaurant, following ads for "tall people" placed in *The Stage* and the *London Evening Standard*. Staff were given a week's training – which included learning the script, the set, safety procedures and how to deal with the public – and paid £5 an hour for marines, £4 for aliens.

At busy times, Alien War has all eight marines on duty. On the day I join I'm introduced to customers as a military observer. Just prior to entering the base I try to explain to Private James Carr – who's 34, and a jobbing actor – that I should lag along behind the group, just watching him work. He's not impressed: "If you're wearing the uniform, you've got to play the part. You'll spoil it for people otherwise."

Trouble is, I can't help feeling that he's right. In the 20 minutes that follow, the importance of each marine's performance in making Alien War happen is all too apparent. Shouting instructions, reacting to situations, injecting a sense of urgency, they do as much to sustain the illusion as any special effect. The problem is, I'm no thespian, and shrink as soon as we got into action. I rally for a time, half-heartedly pointing my pistol and looking over my shoulder with as much urgency as I can muster, before being overcome by my own self-conscious wallyness. John Wayne, I salute you.



Creative director Martin Astles – here inside the actual cryotube used by Ripley in *Alien*^{3} – wants more horror in Alien War...

CREATIVE DIRECTOR MARTIN ASTLES, A 24 YEAR old veteran of *Alien*^{3}, *Candyman*, *the Hellraiser* series and a host of other monster flicks, readily admits that nothing is as scary as a human who can convince you that an emergency situation exists. "The marines are absolutely central to Alien War," he says. "It lives or dies with them. We use people wherever we can. I personally don't like animatronics that much. We're working on a face hugger at the moment that's operated with a hand inside – it's so much more scary than wires and levers. You get an organic quality to the movement."

Astles has just finished building an egg chamber, complete with alien queen, and was sorting out the logistics of a soon-to-be-opened backstage tour when SFX visited. His workshop is littered with memorabilia that would make an *Alien* buff break into a cold sweat – genuine face huggers, assorted creature limbs, and a plaster cast of actress Carrie Henn's head, featured in *Aliens* when Ripley runs through the Atmosphere Processing Centre carrying Newt.

Astles' next project is a full-sized Armoured Personnel Carrier that he wants installed before Christmas. "We've still got quite a lot of space," he says. "There's about 5,000 square feet of a 12,000 square foot site remaining. I'd like to get away from just taking stuff from the actual film *Aliens* – we need new things, so I've been studying the weaponry in the other films, as well as the stuff in the Dark Horse comics." A white storm-trooper jacket, from the climax of *Alien*^{3}, hangs on the wall, as if to illustrate the point. "I'd like to build a Weyland-Yutani morgue that's been desecrated by aliens. But my real dream is to sculpt something as big as the space jockey from the original Alien."

As someone with a professional interest in the series, he's deeply unimpressed by the idea of a cloned Sigourney Weaver returning in *Alien* 4 or 5. "That's the biggest pair of pants I've ever heard," he says, good-naturedly. "I've not spoken to anyone who thinks, 'Yeah, yeah, great idea.' I'd like to see the Aliens home planet being explored – or more of the space jockeys. Who were they? Why has no one talked about them in the two sequels? Wasn't anyone concerned that there was an alien ten times the size of a human piloting this vast ship?"

He also wants more horror in Alien War. "When people come out of it, they're exhilarated. But I want them really screaming, having nightmares. It's all about attacking the senses. For instance, I've heard of one ride where they hang threads of cotton from the ceiling, so that when people run through they feel something touch them. A little thing like that can send you right over the edge."

THE CHAPS AT THE SHARP END OF FRIGHTENING people are, of course, the aliens. You need to be at least 6' 2" tall to wear the magic suit. There are two on duty today – Mark Chawner, 24, and Nick Russell, 22.

Sitting half-dressed in a dingy rest room, sandwiched somewhere in the middle of the set, you're struck by the thought that they must get strange looks when they tell people what they do for a living. "It takes some explaining," agrees Chawner.

The alien costume consists of a black Lycra bodysuit, with about six Gigeresque patches sewn on. They sit around in this most of the day, killing time in a rest room furnished with a couple of chairs, a kettle and an ashtray. The rest of the gear goes on just before they have to attack, on cue from the marines. It takes no time at all to slip on the waistcoat that accounts for the beast's ribs, horns and tail, while the hands are simply a set of nasty looking gloves. They put the head on at the last possible moment because it restricts visibility.

Chawner, whose shaven head would have looked the part on the set of *Alien*^{3}, stumbled into the job. "I've been here since the opening. It's a nice place to work. There's lots of camaraderie. I love it when I get a good group – people screaming like crazy. You can really get into the part."

There are off days, however. "The Christmas before last a group of drunken firemen came in. When I did my first attack they just stood there and laughed at me. They were big men, out of their heads. When I went to do another attack, they picked me up, carried me over to one of the marines, and said, "Here you are, mate, we got one for you.'"

Nick Russell, a 6' 8" languid giant, has also had his troubles. "Some US marines came in once. They said: 'We're big and strong and don't need these Colonial marines.' One tried to attack me in the EEV. So I pinned him down. Thankfully, he backed off."

What they don't mind is people lashing out in fear, although they do admit they've got so accustomed to the set and the costumes they find these reactions quite puzzling. "We've had people running out of here screaming, wetting themselves, crying, hyper-ventilating, vomiting – you name it," says Russell, shaking his head.

He recalls one girl who fled from the EEV in blind panic, accidentally stumbling into the rest room. "She didn't know I was in there," grins Chawner, "so I put on the rest of my suit and tapped her on the shoulder. She ran off, completely crazed."

Russell, who used to be a fire sprinkler technician, is worried that sometimes they're *too* scary. "You look at people and you can see the tears coming – men, women and children. It's amazing. They've just got to get out of there. They'll trample anyone to the floor."

Picking up his head, he pauses before leaving to scare another group. "You certainly get to see some interesting behaviour in here," he says, and disappears into the darkness. I wait five minutes, and then the screaming starts...

Alien War is open from 11am-11pm, 7 days a week. Tickets cost £7.95 each. For more information, phone (0171) 4372678

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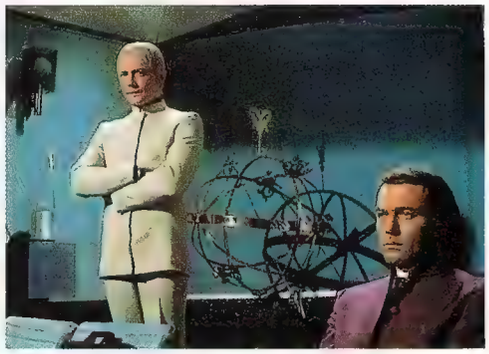
"Some actors would come onto the show and give less than their best simply because Gerry's background was in puppets and children's TV, which really infuriated me."



Futuristic fashions are always tricky to do, but Nehru jackets seem as good a bet as any. At least Ed avoided the purple wigs and the string vests of many *UFO* cast members.

It's one of those real love-it-or-hate-it shows is *UFO*. Is it a soap opera or science fiction? For kids or adults? And are the actors *really* as wooden as Gerry Anderson's earlier puppets? The debate about the *puppetmeister's* first live action show continues to run, not least because its current rescreening is bringing it to the attention of a new generation of fans...

Central to the series is, of course, Commander Ed Straker, played by American actor Ed Bishop. Born in Brooklyn in 1932, Bishop's lived in Britain since his teens, earning himself a position as one of this country's favourite American actors.

"I came here in 1959 as a student at LAMDA," he remembers. "I had a scholarship there for one year. Then, when I finished in 1960, they gave me a 90-day work permit, and I got work almost immediately – three West End shows back-to-back, and a couple of films. I got an agent, met this girl who's now my wife, and – figuring America didn't need another out-of-work actor – decided to stay as long as I was working."

And work he has – you may remember Ed as the newscaster in both the TV and film versions of *Whoops Apocalypse,* performing a song called *Norman Bates* with two-hit wonders Landscape on *Top of the Pops* ("My name is Norman Bates/I'm just a normal guy..."), and guesting on comedy and light entertainment shows like *Jasper Carrott, Lenny Henry* and *French & Saunders* ("I've been lucky to get onto that light entertainment BBC merry-go-round, where they can just dial-a-Yank..."). All these pale into insignificance, however, next to his pivotal role as Commander Ed Straker, head of the earth-defending SHADO organisation in Gerry Anderson's live-action TV show *UFO*.

Striking facially, white-haired, and forever clad in Sylvia Anderson's "21st century fashions," Straker defended Earth from marauding aliens, while running Harlington-Straker Studios, the film company which acted as cover for the top-secret SHADO. Nice work if you can get it.

So, er, how did he?

"Well, my relationship with Gerry Anderson actually goes back to *Captain*

S.H.A.D.O. Maker

WITH UFO BROADCAST AGAIN ON BRAVO, A WHOLE NEW GENERATION IS BEING INTRODUCED TO COMMANDER ED STRAKER AND THE SUPREME HEADQUARTERS ALIEN DEFENCE ORGANISATION. MJ SIMPSON DISCUSSES SAVING EARTH WITH THE MAN WHO PLAYED SHADO'S LEADER, ED BISHOP.

Scarlet and the Mysterons," he explains. "I was the voice of Captain Blue. Actually, I only got that job through a girl in my agent's office. She represented this black actor called Cy Grant, and Gerry and Sylvia wanted to use him for the voice of Lieutenant Green. The girl said, 'Oh, by the way, Mr Anderson, we've just taken on a young American actor, name of Edward Bishop. And we know how much you like American voices. Would you like to meet him as well?' He said, 'Okay, send him out.' So I went out and got the job. I often wonder what would have happened if she hadn't been so on the ball..."

CAPTAIN SCARLET WAS BY FAR THE MOST "adult" of Century 21's puppet series – in terms of characterisation, action and the puppets' appearance – and its theme, a global organisation battling alien marauders, was effectively a direct precursor of *UFO*. Did Ed have any inkling, when he began *Captain Scarlet,* how long he'd be involved with Century 21 productions?

"Well, Gerry's very loyal – if you get along with him, and understand where he's coming from," Ed smiles. "I admired him and his team enormously. They always paid great attention to detail. If they had the voice of a guard – maybe only four or five lines – for example, nine out of ten companies would say, 'Hey Eddie, can you do a funny voice for those four lines?' But Gerry would job in another actor."

After *Scarlet,* was it straight into *UFO*?

"Well, not quite. Gerry did a feature film called *Doppelganger,* or *Journey to the Far Side of the Sun* in America. I had a part in that, and when they were setting up *UFO* they took my scenes from it to show Lew Grade and the other power brokers. They had me in mind to play Straker, which in those days was only supposed to be a ten-day shoot – Straker wasn't meant to be the main character. Eventually he just sort of took over, though."

Although *Doppelganger* – and, to a lesser extent, the obscure semi-animated series *The Secret Service* – had shown that the Century 21 team could do more than just puppetry, the powers that be were still insecure about what Gerry "the puppet man" would do with real actors and a decent budget. Was Ed aware of this while the series was shooting?

"Oh, there's no denying it," he concedes. "We had some very unkind people who would make cheap jokes like 'I don't see any strings.'

"Timelash" – one of the controversial "drugs" episodes which gave the ITV programmers such a hard time...

It's still going on because of Gerry's background. I've always found it very counter-productive – some actors would come on the show and give less than their best simply because Gerry's background was in puppets and kids' TV, which really infuriated me."

Fans of *UFO* applaud the series for concentrating on characters and the psychological effects of alien attacks, rather than resorting to technobabble and dodgy monsters. The unconverted, on the other hand, point at this same stuff and see only purple-wigged soap opera hokum...

"Yes, the show concentrated on the background, the personalities, and the personal angst of the characters," Ed agrees, "and as a result some of the episodes fell between two stools – sort of half science fiction, half soap opera..."

Do you think of it as a kids show, an adult show or what? It seems kind of uncertain what it is itself...

"It was primarily aimed at adults," he says, after a bit of thought, "but I recognise the problem. Some of the episodes were very adventurous – long before women's lib and all the rest of it, we brought in Wanda Ventham as Straker's number two, and, of course, we had a young boy die [in "A Question of Priorities"] instead of a 'happy ending' – that was very adventurous. On *The Saint* or *The Protectors* or whatever, you always knew that, no matter what, Roger Moore would be back next week. We were doing something more exciting than that."

Like every Anderson show, from *Supercar* through to *Space Precinct, UFO* was aimed primarily at the American market. Did this ever cause problems?

"Well, it was a kind of fascism in a way. We were certainly making something for a foreign country, to their formula, and they had a whole list of things you could and couldn't do – you couldn't have the eyes open on a corpse, for example. I found that a little restrictive, but it was the economic realities of the day. If you didn't get the American market, you didn't get anything."

At 63, Ed is still acting – and currently touring with the National Theatre production of Arthur Miller's new play *Broken Glass* – but when asked what he'll probably be remembered for, he has no doubts.

"Whether I like it or not, it's going to be old Straker in *UFO*. A lot of the actors think *Scarlet* and *UFO* is all water over the dam, and they don't like talking about it, but I can't understand that. If people applaud your work so many years down the pike, it's flattering. I feel very humbled by it."

The old spinning headline trick, circa 1949.

Johnny Duncan and Robert Lowery star...

Vicky Vale meets a (fairly) young Alfred.

This huge spotlight summons Batman.

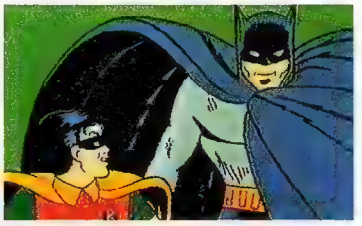
Yes, *this* is the Batmobile – painful, isn't it?

A crap and unthreatening '40s villain.

How could anyone take this seriously?

Commissioner Gordon bursts into colour!

Aunt Harriet warns Bruce to dress up warm.



The '60s *Batman's* cartoon titles sequence.

The Bright, Colourful Knight returns.

"Riddle-me-ree!" cries Frank Gorshin, oddly.

"Holy appalling back-projection, Batman!"

Note the zany camera angles/hair/clothes...

Billy Dee Williams, the 1989 Harvey Dent.

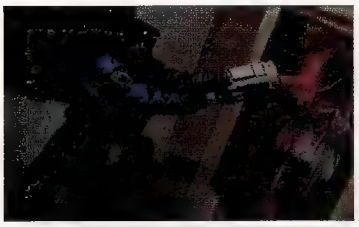
A delightfully more up-to-date Vicky Vale.

Burton's Batman was a right psycho...

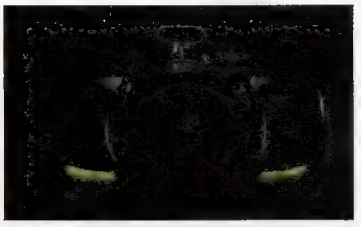
...mind you, so was the Joker! What a guy!

Sweeping set designs abound in the '89 film.

The first contestant signs in...

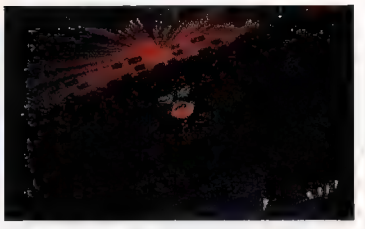


Art criticism reaches new heights.



Now, *this* is what we call a Batmobile!

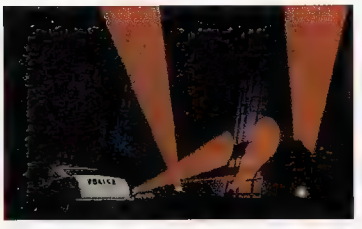
The animated series – and that classic pose.



Our first glimpse of Catwoman.

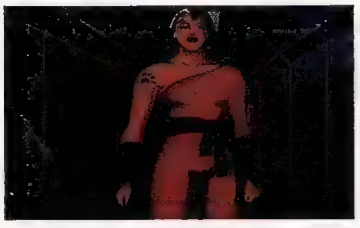
The classic cloak-shrouded look...

Bruce Wayne – babe magnet and playboy!

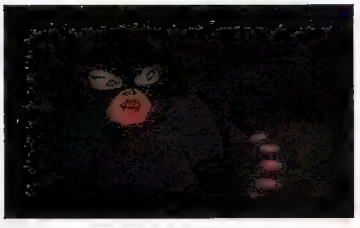


Plenty of lightbeams litter the cartoon.

Batman and Gordon compare chins.

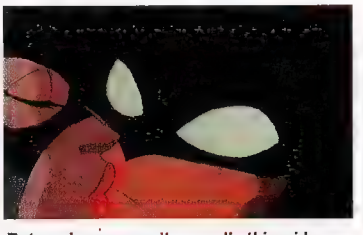


Soviet shotputter-babe, the Red Claw.



"So fetching when you're down on all fours!"

Catwoman takes a tumble.



Batman's eyes aren't normally this wide...

All screenshots © Warner Bros. and Columbia TriStar

WHO *IS* THE BEST BATMAN?

As if you hadn't noticed, Batman Forever has just opened. And once again the nation demands to know who's the best Batman. The only way to find out, we decided, was to spend an entire evening in Gotham City. **Jonathan Davies** came along to do all the note-taking...

Who is the best Batman isn't the only question being posed by *Batman Forever's* release. Is there room for humour in Batman? Is Robin an important part of the myth, or an embarrassing burden? Should Batman's chest-plate have nipples? Did you used to have one of those Dinky Batmobiles with the missiles that came out of the back and that serrated cleaver thing that popped out the front? And what was wrong with the perfectly good Batmobile from the first film anyway?

We were confused, and a VCR-based battle to the death between the various Batmen seemed the only solution. A guest list was drawn up: Simo, who can effect a computer-like recall of television trivia; Karen, who's strongly drawn to Michael Keaton; Nick, who professes no Batman preference; two Andys, one of whom owns a complete set of Batman comics and despises the '60s television series, while the other adores it (for your additional entertainment the two will not be distinguished); and, of course, me.

It seemed sensible to proceed chronologically, so come back with us now as we take our seats in a picture house of the late 1940s and the lights are dimmed...

7.26pm
Batman and Robin (1949)

Two figures dressed in cloaks and masks step on screen. As they glance around uncertainly, the titles reveal them to be Batman and Robin, and this to be "Chapter One: Batman Takes Over." We are now shown footage of car chases, explosions, discharging tommy guns and whirling newspaper headlines. Exciting music plays.

Nick: *"Is this the one with the Na-na-na-na-na-na-na music?"*
Andy: *"No, that's the next one."*
Karen: "I've heard this is awful."
Simon: *"Shh!"*

"Crime," says the voiceover, "stalking our city by night and day, is on the increase. Our undermanned police force is powerless to cope with the situation. But they have an ally, Batman, who, with the faithful Robin, wages unending war against all criminals."

We see Batman (Robert Lowery) and Robin (John Duncan) waging unending war against all criminals for a bit, and then retiring to the Batcave, which, we are told, lies beneath Wayne Manor. Bruce has a visitor, the attractive newspaper reporter Vicki Vale.

"You'd better be careful. I think she's beginning to get wise that Batman and Bruce Wayne are the same," warns Robin for the benefit of the slower members of the audience.

We then see a distinguished gentleman picking up the telephone.

"This is Commissioner Gordon," he says. "I have confidential information from Washington that you have perfected your remote control machine."

"It's the biggest thing we've ever done," replies the scientific-looking man on the other end of the line somewhat sternly. "It will revolutionise transportation."

Several gentlemen now watch the remote control machine being demonstrated. It steers a small remote-controlled car around a table. Remotely. The onlookers are flabbergasted.

"The possibilities of this thing in criminal hands are appalling. Why, one man could control the industry of an entire city."

Presently, the machine falls into criminal hands. An evil masterplan is in operation...

The Bat Signal (which, strangely enough, looks like one of those machines that measure your pulse for 50p, but projects a huge bat-shaped symbol into the night sky as if a bit of celluloid with a bat-shaped symbol drawn on it has been superimposed over some film of the night sky) is activated. And Batman and Robin set out to save the city.
Andy: *"This is excellent, nearly as good as the '60s one."*
Andy: *"This is terrible..."*

Our heroes are up against the Wizard, who is using the remote control machine to assemble a stockpile of missiles. His secret hideout appears to be the Batcave with the furniture moved around a bit, and he wears a mask so we can't guess who he really is.
Karen: *"It's Alfred, obviously. The butler did it."*

The paraphernalia, which will be familiar to Batfans of the '90s – utility belts, Batarangs, Batropes etc. – is absent. Instead, Batman has perfected the crime-fighting technique of dropping into the midst of a group of hoodlums from a great height, stumbling awkwardly, and then getting beaten up. Robin generally arrives a short time afterwards, and gets beaten up as well. The problem tends to be their cloaks, which have apparently been improvised from some old sheets dyed black. Robin is constantly being grabbed by his cloak, while Batman tends to get his wrapped

This fellow is the eponymous Phantasm.

Evidence – and Gordon – points to...

...Bruce Wayne! ("Surely not?" cries Alfred.)

"He's ours, girl, so keep your distance..."

around his neck, or trips over it a lot. At the climax of the episode, we see a model aeroplane explode...

Andy: *"Airfix'll probably get a credit at the end of this."*

...with Batman and Robin inside it. "Don't miss 'Tunnel of Terror,' the second exciting episode of Batman and Robin at this theatre next week!" yells the voiceover excitedly. We can't wait that long, and are grateful that the aforementioned exciting episode of *Batman and Robin* immediately follows on our tape. As "Tunnel of Terror" begins, we see the aeroplane blow up again, but not before some extra footage has been inserted showing Batman and Robin escaping just in time.

There are 15 episodes like this altogether, with titles like "Chapter Four: Batman Trapped" and "Chapter Five: Robin Rescues Batman," so we decided to leap forwards 20 years and see what difference colour would make. It's also about time the pizzas arrived.

8.30pm Batman (1966)

Not just colour, but true '60s-o-vision, in fact.

"We have already seen a quiet Gotham City bank... A sneaky operation... Apprehended... Not quite... A load of lead..." – the picture freezes after each of these – "Good night, sweet guard... A call to Batman... He's on his way... Hey, hey, hey... The brass was stumped... But Batman wasn't... He planted a story... A pair of crooks and one's a doll... Batman sets a doll trap... And the doll was tempted... The trap looked tasty... But the doll turned the tables and snatched Aunt Harriet... Holy backfire!"

And so on until we're filled in on last week's happenings and can proceed with confidence into "A Death Worse Than Fate." The Bat-logo whirls around in the centre of the screen and the music goes "Na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na" and all the rest of it. We are introduced to the "Special Guest Villainess" – Anne Baxter, who plays Zelda.

Andy: *"Look at the weird camera angles. And look at the way they've chopped off Bruce Wayne's head in the foreground. That's pure '60s TV, that is..."*

Andy: *"Has this one got Catwoman in it? She was gorgeous. Who played her?"*
Simo: *"Well, Julie Newmar was in the first two seasons, and Eartha Kitt was in the last season, but she only actually appeared twice. And Lee Meriwether played her in the film."*

Bruce Wayne (Adam West), Batman's alter ego, now plays a bigger role, but he's terribly dull. We are introduced to Batarangs, utility belts, Butcuffs, and a bookcase which slides back to reveal a pair of poles and the legend "Access to Batcave via Batpoles." Batman now has eyebrows drawn on his mask, a less pointy nose, and a shiny, higher quality cloak that doesn't get in the way quite so much. Furthermore, having decided that driving around in Bruce Wayne's car is a bit of

"But for all its brilliance, can the animated *Batman* stand the strain of a feature-length episode?"

a giveaway, he's constructed the Batmobile, a fine piece of machinery.

There's the regular voiceover: "Where indeed? For back behind the phoney bookstore, Avol is ready with his inescapable doom trap..."

There are the inescapable doom traps:

"Our utility belts!" cries a diminutive Robin (Burt Ward).

"Useless!" counters Avol. "My jet-age plastics are impervious to your tools."

"Holy graveyard, Batman. This could be – curtains. But wait! A gas lighter than air..."

"...must ...have ...hydrogen in it."

"If we could electrify it!" Etc...

There are the riddles:

"When is a person like a piece of wood?" asks one of the Riddler's messages in the following episode.

"A person is a piece of wood when he's a ruler," reasons Robin.

"You figure it has something to do with King Boris?"

"Maybe..."

"Good thinking, Robin. But no attempt was made to abduct or to harm him."

"Ruler... King... Chess king... The international chess tournament tonight! And $25,000 in prize money!"

"Boy Wonder, you've done it again! To the Batmobile!"
Andy: *"The trouble is, it doesn't take itself seriously enough."*
Karen: *"Can you imagine what it would be like if it did take itself seriously, though?"*

No pizzas yet. Perhaps they've got the address wrong.

9.39pm Batman (1989)

It is night. The camera sweeps through Gotham City, which looks like any other American city, only more so. Steam rises from the gratings. The characters are from the '40s, but the cars they drive and the music they listen to are modern. Once again, the streets are overrun with crime.

In a quiet back alley there's a mugging. The perpetrators retire to gloat over their haul. But they are interrupted by a mysterious figure who emerges from a cloud of steam. They shoot him several times and he falls over. But then he gets back to his feet (body armour) and beats them up.

"Who are you?" they ask him.

"I'm Batman," he replies, and disappears into the night.

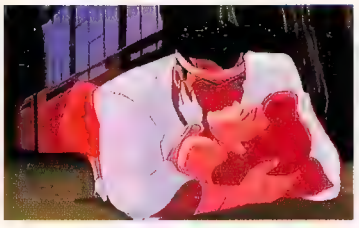
Andy: *"This film's brilliant up to the point where Batman gets shot. But then it goes downhill when he gets up again."*

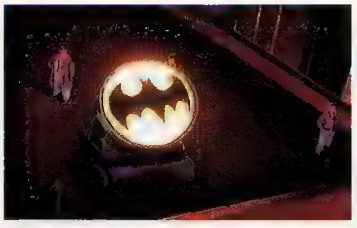
The Caped Crusader has now definitely become the Dark Knight – a true superhero. He treads a fine line between good and evil, hounded by criminals and the police alike, haunted by his parents' murder. As Bruce Wayne, he's lonely and socially awkward. As Batman, he's invincible, with an economy of movement matched only by that of his Bat-gadgets, and a cloak (properly sorted out at last) that billows impressively when he descends from the sky and doesn't get in the way. The Batmobile, too, is superb.
Karen: *"I love the bit in a minute, where it's zooming along the road in a cloud of spray and autumn leaves."*
Simo: *"Tim Burton is God."*
Andy: *"And Jack Nicholson is, of course, fabulous, as the Joker."*

Well, he's all right. But Michael Keaton's a lot less irritating. And even Batman needs to eat. Perhaps it's time to phone up and find out where those pizzas have got to?
Andy: *"There are no pizzas."*
Karen: *"What?"*
Andy: *"Didn't you hear? Matt said we couldn't have any, so we all ate something before we came."*

Against a background of embarrassing rumbling noises, Batman runs its course, with Danny Elfman's hell-spawned music rising to a predictably ooh-aah-jingly-jangly ending. And all are agreed that, so far, Michael Keaton is

Bruce battles token love interest at judo...


...and puts her in an unconventional hold.


Searchlights have come a long way since '49.

Typical grandiose *Phantasm* artwork.

the best Batman. We decline (by agreement) to watch the sequel, however, on the grounds that it's awful. Instead, onwards to the next Batman, who is, er, a cartoon?

11.45pm Batman: The Animated Adventures (1992)

The animated *Batman* series is a far cry from other animated spin-offs *(Star Trek* and *Tarzan* spring to mind). This is animation at its finest, with brilliant storyboarding and graphic work, and high-quality scripts. We're watching a two-parter called "The Cat And The Claw," which introduces Catwoman.

The first thing we see is the feline one scaling the side of a building, cutting through a window with one of her claws, and slipping her cat (which has been lying unnoticed on her shoulders) in through the hole. The cat then makes its way through a sophisticated security system, swipes a diamond necklace, and returns to its owner, who then begins to make her escape. But she is being watched by a shadowy figure on the roof...

"Magnificent," she coos as Batman jumps down and stands before her.

And he is rather: A massive jaw, impossibly wide shoulders, a huge chest, enormous arms and a firm gaze.

"I suggest you save the flattery for the judge," growls Batman, and reaches to apprehend her.

A chase ensues in which Catwoman leaps from rooftop to rooftop and swings about using her whip. But wherever she lands, Batman is waiting for her. Eventually, she gives him the slip, but leaves her cat behind, which finds itself in the path of an oncoming lorry. Batman dashes across the road and grabs it, landing in a crouch on the pavement opposite with his cloak spread around him.

Andy: *"That's classic Batman, that is, the way his cloak's doing that. It's great the way they've included things that'll get dedicated Batman comic saddos like me going."*

The atmosphere of the animated *Batman* is even darker than Tim Burton's – practically everything set at night – and the setting is even more chronologically ambiguous – the cars, guns and stuff are all taken directly from the '40s, but there are plenty of high-tech computers thrown in too.

All well and good, but what really makes animated *Batman* great is the attention to detail, the way every shot has been carefully thought through. Shadows move across characters' faces when they turn their heads. There's lots of use of reflections – Batman has his back to us as he's talking to Commissioner Gordon, but we can see his face in the window he's staring out of. There's a great fight on the roof of a train too, with the combatants silhouetted against the moon. (Lots of things get silhouetted against the moon in animated *Batman.)* Batman's eyes narrow when he's thinking hard, something an actor hidden behind a mask can't really achieve. Or the screen might fade to black by Batman walking towards us until the bat logo on his chest fills the screen. Explosions are superb, and car chases just as exciting as their live-action equivalents. The women too are often more attractive than their real-life counterparts (and somewhat less unnerving).

Andy: *"The way the guns fire is just like what you get in* Akira."

Andy: *"Yeah, they seem to have pinched quite a few of the best bits from things like* Akira, *but then they've done it properly, with stories that make sense."*

It's full of neat ideas, too. In one bit, for instance, Catwoman runs out onto the roof of a building and wedges the door shut behind her with a plank, but the baddies who're hot on her heels don't even bother trying the handle, and just shoot the door down. Another example: Catwoman distractedly chops out a circle of glass from the top of a coffee table with her fingernail, catching it as it falls through with the same hand.

The scripts are just as great...

"Red Claw – a woman?" gasps Batman as he finally tracks down this week's baddy.

"Do you have a problem with that?" snaps Red Claw.

"Not at all. I'm an equal opportunity crime fighter."

There are perhaps one too many "nine lives" jokes, though.

1.07am Batman: Mask of the Phantasm (1993)

But, for all its brilliance, can the animated *Batman* stand the strain of a whole feature-length adventure? Is animation the way forward for the caped crusader? Or is the path clear for Batman Forever to swoop in and reclaim the crown?

Mask of the Phantasm was, of course, never released in cinemas in this country, and went straight onto video.

Simo: *"It seems strange that they didn't release it as a Widescreen version, considering that the people who are likely to be interested in it – people like us – tend to buy everything they can in that format..."*

At least it's available, though. Warner seems strangely reluctant to release the regular episodes on video, where they'd surely be snapped up by Batfans weary of wading through the otherwise tedious children's TV schedules for their fix.

Mask of the Phantasm tells the story of the Phantasm, a character who's sweeping

around Gotham City killing gangsters indiscriminately. The police, however, reckon Batman is responsible for the crimes and are trying to track him down.

During the film we learn about Bruce's gradual transformation into Batman – his overall "plan" – and something of his cautious attitude towards girls. This involves frequent flashbacks...

Andy: *"This is all a bit confusing. I wish they'd make the screen go a bit more wibbly when they flashback."*

...which gives us a neat effect whereby the World of the Future fair that Bruce visits in his youth is later transformed into a sinisterly decaying battleground. We have a great villain in the Phantasm, who glides around in a cloud of smoke, dressed in a hockey mask and hood, and wielding a lethal blade. (At least half of those present confessed to not guessing the Phantasm's true identity.) And there's a guest appearance by the Joker, who's superb with his yellow eyes and teeth.

The script is pretty solid throughout too. (Alfred stands behind Bruce Wayne while a TV news report is accusing Batman of being as crazy as the criminals he puts away. "Such rot, sir," he says when it's finished. "Why, you're the very model of sanity. Oh, by the way, I've pressed your tights and put away your exploding gas balls.") But perhaps this instalment of animated *Batman* is a little stretched at over an hour and a quarter – *Mask of the Phantasm* is only ever as good as the TV series, when really it needs to be a whole lot better.

Still, it's a damn sight better than what we had to put up with earlier. In fact, from the look of things, Batman just seems to be getting better and better all the time – a trend continued in style by *Batman Forever...*

Videos of the original Batman and Robin *(Columbia TriStar) have been deleted, but* Batman *(£9.99),* Batman Returns *(£14.99) and* Mask of the Phantasm *(£10.99) are all available from Warner Home Video. The '60s serial is being reissued on video by Fox (£10.99 each).*

BLUE THUNDER 1984

THE FEATURE FILM BOASTED SOME NEAT HELICOPTER STUNTS AND AN INTERESTING UNDERLYING "HOW FAR SHOULD THE POLICE HAVE THE RIGHTS TO GO?" THEME. THE EMBARRASSING TV SHOW, ON THE OTHER HAND, FEATURED CARDBOARD TV CHARACTERS AND A CAREER-WORST PERFORMANCE FROM WAYNE'S WORLD'S DANA CARVEY. IT'S NO WONDER AIRWOLF WHUPPED ITS ASS, RECKONS **JON ABBOTT.**

The cast of *Blue Thunder* (the TV version) with the title star chopper. From far left: James Farentino as pilot and series star Frank Chaney; Dana Carvey as geeky, annoying Clinton Wonderlove, clearly showing *no* sign of his future star quality; and Lyman "Bubba" Kelsey and Dick Butkus as Bubba and Ski, ex-NFL pro-footballers and "hilarious" comedy relief.

Who remembers *Blue Thunder*, either the feature film or the spin-off TV series, both of which starred a state-of-the-art helicopter with more add-ons than a Moulinex? Admittedly, the 1983 feature had stuff to recommend it – chiefly the eponymous police helicopter, and the interplay between pilot Roy Scheider and evil rival Malcolm McDowell – but the TV show that followed most certainly didn't. In fact, it stank.

In both versions, the hi-tech machine took centre-stage. Blue Thunder, reads the promotional blurb, "prowls the city skies at 250mph, protecting its occupants with inch-thick armour." Its two locator lights are "three times brighter than the sun," which presumably means instant blindness for any civilian who happens to glance into the sky... The machine also had "the awesome power to see and hear through walls." "The weaponry and surveillance systems exist today, but have not yet been assembled in a single machine," finishes the blurb – adding, with deliberate menace, "but the potential is there..."

Indeed, the feature film made much of the Big Brother capabilities of the futuristic helicopter, and the numerous opportunities for abuse by police authorities – but all this stuff was merrily dispensed with for the juvenile TV series that appeared the following year. Still, at least the latter didn't look too out of place next to its rivals – the 1983-84 US TV season was packed with thick-ear shows like *TJ Hooker, Manimal* and *Hotel*...

Rare, behind-the-scenes action shot from the short-lived *Blue Thunder*. The chopper was SF in '84, but looks ordinary today.

In keeping with many of its contemporaries, the more dubious (and therefore interesting) aspects of the show were defused by the introduction of some very heavy-handed humour. Scheider's tormented and self-questioning Frank Murphy was replaced by New-York-stage-actor-turned-TV-workman James Farentino as the easy-going devil-may-care rebel Frank Chaney, while Chaney's co-pilot was the obnoxious and stupidly named Clinton Wonderlove, who loathed his acronym nickname JAFO ("Just

Another Frustrated Observer") – a somewhat embarrassing early role for Dana Carvey of *Saturday Night Live* and *Wayne's World* fame.

WHO'S WHO?

In a TV environment shared by the likes of *Hill Street Blues, Magnum* and *Cheers, Blue Thunder* was remarkably simplistic – most obviously in its paint-by-numbers characterisation. Frank Chaney was a typical TV action-adventure hero of the period – post-*Magnum*, everybody had to be a Vietnam vet – and a cheery, rule-breaking wiseguy.

Dana Carvey was cast as the clichéd computer nerd (see also Murray Bozinsky in *Riptide*), while providing mobile ground support (for no obvious reason, given *Blue Thunder's* capabilities) in the computer-laden Rolling Thunder van were former football players-turned-actors Dick Butkus and Bubba Smith as comic relief duo "Ski" and "Bubba." These two were actually exploiting their US TV notoriety from a series of Miller Lite beer commercials, something that must have made viewers at the time wonder whether they were watching a comedy show or an ad break.

Still, Carvey was so cringingly unfunny as "JAFO" that it was actually a relief when Butkus and Smith came on to do what was essentially a re-run of the old Sharkey and Kowalski bits that used to pad out *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* in the '60s – not surprising, given the fact that writing team John and Ward Hawkins, best known for their work on TV Westerns, supervised briefly on both series. Also padding the show were hefty chunks of the expensive *Blue Thunder* feature film, which provided most of the series' set pieces during its 11-week slide into oblivion.

A few things you probably didn't know about...

BLUE THUNDER

- Series star James Farentino can sometimes be seen wearing a USS Nimitz sweatshirt in the series. It's a souvenir from his role in the time travel film *The Final Countdown*, which was shot aboard that very vessel...
- The law firm Farentino worked for in *The Bold Ones* was Nichols, Darrell and Darrell – as opposed to Larry, Daryll and Daryll in *Newhart*...
- Sandy McPeak's first TV job was as the leading man's stand-in on the Western series *Lawman*...
- Butkus and Smith were reunited as a team for the short-lived 1985 TV series *Half Nelson* – starring the then-unknown newcomer Joe Pesci...
- *Blue Thunder* was very nearly the second TV role for former Buck Rogers, Gil Gerard...
- The title *Blue Thunder* was devised by Dan O'Bannon as a parody of former cop and pro-police novelist (and apologist) Joseph Wambaugh's novels-turned-movies – *The New Centurions, The Blue Knight, The Choirboys*, etc.

  "I find his image of the police slightly ridiculous," says O'Bannon. "The saintly guys in blue keeping us, the barbarians, from destroying civilisation..." Ironically, James Farentino made several appearances in Wambaugh's '70s TV series *Police Story*.
- Of *Blue Thunder* feature film director John Badham, O'Bannon prophetically complained, "He directs a $20 million movie like a TV episode!"
- And of the vehicle itself, O'Bannon raged, "they envisioned it as a big thing with crap hanging all over it, while we saw it as a fast, black wasp – compact and deadly." To his annoyance, *Airwolf* more closely resembles a fast, black wasp...
- Producer Roy Huggins created *The Fugitive*, and also wrote scripts for (and produced) *Alias Smith and Jones* and *The Rockford Files* under his pen-name John Thomas James – the names of his sons. Other shows he has produced include *Maverick, 77, Sunset Strip, Hunter*, and Farentino's earlier series *The Bold Ones* and *Cool Million*...
- With the series' cancellation, many of the show's behind-the-scenes people moved over to the more successful *Airwolf*, including helicopter stunt pilot James Gavin and producer Don Baer.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

For James Farentino, *Blue Thunder* remains just one of many TV series roles – although, apart from his part in the law court episodes of the excellent *The Bold Ones* in the early '70s, he hasn't appeared in anything that's run for very long. Only four customers could be found willing to pay the *Cool Million* required for his services as a mercenary in the short-lived series of *Mystery Movies*, for instance.

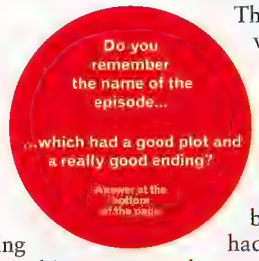
Still, he remains a jobbing TV performer and rarely off-screen. Perhaps his best known role would be the year he spent in *Dynasty* during the second season, but he also co-starred in the sitcom *Mary and Julie*, alongside Mary Tyler Moore and Julie Andrews. Today, he appears frequently in TV mini-series.

Sandy McPeak's role as no-nonsense police boss Captain Braddock was one of his more unusual credits; most of his TV work has been in such liberal TV series as *Hill Street Blues, St. Elsewhere, LA Law, Little House on the Prairie*, and *Lou Grant*. He's also turned up in episodes of *Knight Rider, Charlie's Angels* and *The Incredible Hulk*.

Former US football player turned actor Dick Butkus has appeared in *The Rockford Files, Rich Man, Poor Man, Columbo, Police Story, Vegas, Fantasy Island, Magnum, Simon and Simon*, and *Matt Houston*, but following *Blue Thunder* concentrate on comedy roles, including a two-year run as diner owner Klawicki in the sitcom *My Two Dads*, while Bubba Smith, another ex-American footballer, came to the series from two failed sitcoms, *Semi-Tough* and *Open All Night*.

Later on, of course, he went on to become one of the regulars in the *Police Academy* films. His TV appearances include *Charlie's Angels, Wonder Woman* and *Hart to Hart*...

Er, has anybody seen Dana Carvey lately?



Meet the gang, joined by Ann Cooper as dispatcher JJ Cooper.

WHY IT DIDN'T WORK

The big problem with *Blue Thunder* was that it found itself competing head-to-head with a very similar, but far superior, show – *Airwolf*. You know how it is – every so often, two rival networks in the US come up with two similar shows at the same time, and each broadcaster vainly claims to have had their version in the works first. It happened in the '60s with *The Munsters* and *The Addams Family*; it happened last season with *ER* and *Chicago Hope*; and it just so happens that *Blue Thunder* made its debut on ABC in the same season CBS announced *Airwolf*, with both going on air early in 1984.

As it turned out, *Blue Thunder* was a pale shadow of the far superior and seriously insane *Airwolf*, which ran for three seasons while *Blue Thunder* crashed after just 13 episodes – a grim irony, given that *Airwolf* was also quite plainly "inspired" by the *Blue Thunder* feature film, not to mention the similar Clint Eastwood starrer, *Firefox*. Furthermore, although *Airwolf's* right-wing politics made *Blue Thunder* look like *The Trials of Rosie O'Neill*, it at least dared to tackle the political and privacy issues of the spy-in-the-sky technology broached in the feature film, something the TV version of *Blue Thunder* chose to completely ignore...

Indeed, the scripts for the *Blue Thunder* series always endeavoured to make the facts fit the fantasy, and so justify the intrusions on civil liberties the grinning Chaney indulged in every week. Clearly a losing battle, and one the US public wouldn't tolerate for long...

Answer: No, we can't either.

Fact File

Regular cast

Frank Chaney: **James Farentino**
Clinton "JAFO" Wonderlove: **Dana Carvey**
Richard "Ski" Butowski: **Dick Butkus**
Lyman "Bubba" Kelsey: **Bubba Smith**
Captain Braddock: **Sandy McPeak**
JJ Douglas: **Ann Cooper**

Executive Producer: **Roy Huggins**
Co-executive Producer: **David Moessinger**
Producers: **Jeri Taylor, Don Baer**
Music: **Frank Denson**
Developed for television by **Roy Huggins** and **Don Safran**, from an idea by **Don Jakoby** and **Dan O'Bannon**

Total number of episodes: **11**
Pilot episode airdate: **No pilot**
Official series start: **6 January 1984**
First UK airdate: **Summer 1984**
Last original episode aired: **7 September 1984**
Some TV precedents: ***Supercar, Whirlybirds, Thunderbirds***
Some TV descendants: ***Airwolf, Streethawk, The Highwayman, RoboCop.***

Guest stars of interest: Richard Lynch, Tracy Scoggins.

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It's unstoppable! The SFX Review Guide continues to grow – 28 pages, this month! – each one packed with the latest film, TV, book, video and games reviews...

REVIEWS

Power Rangers in "great" shock, Dredd in "dull" stunner, and loads, loads more...

Ratings? We adore 'em, and we hope you do too...

We love our little rating system – neat, simple, nicely old-fashioned and niftily reminiscent of our old school days – but for those who can't work out that A is better than B, or that "plus" is better than "minus," here's a little comparative breakdown, this month done in the style of shitty old TV superheroes. (Well, this *is* the month of *Batman* and *Judge Dredd...*)

- A+ Val Kilmer as *Batman*: Perfect!
- A Dean Cain as *Superman*: Brilliant!
- A- Michael Keaton as *Batman*: Pretty damn good.
- B+ Adam West as *Batman*: Plenty of fun.
- B Christopher Reeves as *Superman*: Distinctly variable.
- B- Linda Carter as *Wonder Woman*: Fun.
- C+ Lou Ferrigno as *The Hulk*: Looks the part...
- C George Reeves as *Superman*: Showing its age.
- C- John Wesley Shipp as *The Flash*: Some people like it.
- D+ Ultraman as, er, *Ultraman*: Strictly for fans.
- D Matt Salinger as *Captain America*: Forget it.
- D- Nicholas Hammond as *Spiderman*: Oh,dear lord...

FILM Reviews — **PAGE 72**
The big Summer releases – *Batman Forever, Judge Dredd, Power Rangers* and *Congo* – all given the full SFX review treatment. Two are better than expected, but which two? Plus, The Month in Film.

TV Reviews — **PAGE 78**
Golden oldie *UFO* meets the last few episodes of *The New Adventures of Superman*, plus new US shows *Sliders* and *Space: Above and Beyond* and The Month in TV.

VIDEO Reviews — **PAGE 82**
This month's video reviews include *Timecop* on rental, a bunch of *Tekwar* TV films on sell-through, plus loads of re-releases on Warner's new Beyond Vision and Terror Vision labels...

BOOK Reviews — **PAGE 90**
Colin Greenland's ace *Seasons of Plenty*, Stephen King's latest, *Insomnia*, plus newies from Anne McCaffrey, Harry Turtledove, Tanith Lee, CJ Cherryh and more...

MODEL Reviews — **PAGE 96**
This month we've got a rather fancy *Deep Space Nine* model, complete with hundreds of fibre-optic lights, for your perusal, plus *Star Wars* Micro Playsets, a Meccano-like starship Enterprise, and more...

NEW MEDIA Reviews — **PAGE 98**
Find out how a brilliant new strategy game called *Command & Conquer* is wowing the crowds, plus a review of *FX Fighter*, the stunning new beat-'em-up for – wait for it! – the PC...

COMIC Reviews — **PAGE 100**
The two sides of Alan Moore – the serious artist of *From Hell*, and the jobbing wordsmith of *Spawn* – compared, plus *Goddess* and the latest incarnation of John Constantine, *Hellblazer*...

TOSH Reviews — **PAGE 102**
The usual miscellany, including *Star Trek* talking books, *Judge Dredd* phonecards, and – shock! – one little item that's actually rather good...

"What Joel Schumacher has done is to successfully combine the original Dark Knight with the OTT camp hero of the '60s TV series. 'It'll never work!' you cry. But it does, I assure you..."

BATMAN FOREVER

The third instalment has more going for it than the previous two films put together!

The "new" Batmobile goes up in flames! Fortunately, Batman is covered for third party, fire and theft...

Batstudio: **Warner Bros**
Batdirector: **Joel Schumacher**
Starring: **Val Kilmer, Tommy Lee Jones, Jim Carrey, Nicole Kidman, Chris O'Donnell**
Batcert: **PG**
Running bat-time: **122 mins**
Release: **Now showing**

Bat-text: **MJ Simpson**

From the opening line – Alfred's "Can I persuade you to take a sandwich with you, Sir?" – it's clear that this is a distinct move away from Tim Burton's *Batman* movies. And, indeed, it is.

A little disconcertingly, the story kicks off with Batman's attempts to defuse a hostage crisis – instigated by nasty ol' Harvey Two-Face – which turns out to be a trap. There are two problems with this. First, Schumacher is a terrific director, but he really can't handle action sequences – he uses far too many quick cuts, to the extent that it's sometimes difficult to tell precisely who's doing what, and to whom. This is a recurring fault throughout the film, albeit the only major one.

The second problem is that the audience, replete with memories of Burton's gloomily gothic brace of flicks, will be unprepared for the sheer tongue-in-cheek glee of Schumacher's take on the character. Imagine if Indiana Jones' first two outings had been serious Rider Haggard tales: How would you have reacted to *The Last Crusade?*

You see, what Schumacher has done, improbably enough, is to successfully combine the original Tim Burton/Frank Miller-style Dark Knight with the OTT camp hero of the '60s TV series. "It'll never work!" you cry. But it does, I assure you. Oh come on – you've seen the U2 video, with a straight-faced Val Kilmer asserting "It's the car. Chicks love the car." Well, that's the level of confidence that Schumacher brings to the whole thing, aided by a witty script from Lee Batchler, Janet Scott Batchler and Akiva Goldsman.

Unlike the simple di-and trichotomies of *Batman* and *Batman Returns*, *Batman Forever* presents us with an ensemble cast, and uniformly excellent performances. Representing the forces of naughtiness are current Hollywood golden boy Jim Carrey as Edward Nygma, aka The Riddler, and Oscar-winner Tommy Lee Jones as Harvey Dent, aka Two-Face. E Nygma is a former employee of Wayne Enterprises whose experiments with brain-waves lead to the development of a completely interactive, highly addictive TV system. He teams up with acid-scarred former district attorney Dent for a crime-spree which will enable him to market his invention and eventually ruin Bruce Wayne. In return, he will help Two-Face defeat Batman.

Carrey was born to play both the eccentric Edward Nygma and his camp alter-ego The Riddler, contorting his face and body into geometric puzzles. How can one man have so many knees? (Incidentally, let us thank assorted gods that Robin Williams didn't get the role, and ruin it with his desperately unfunny histrionics.) Similarly, Jones is superbly deranged as the schizoid Two-Face, but without ever going over the top. It's clear that both actors had not just a whale of a time making this film, but an entire school of cetaceans.

E Nygma (Jim Carrey) and Sugar (Drew Barrymore) celebrate the launch of Nygma's brain gizmo.

Opposing them is Val Kilmer, who invests more character into Bruce Wayne/Batman than Michael Keaton ever did. The central storyline deals with him finally coming to terms with his superhero identity and exorcising the memories of his parents' deaths, aided by psychologist and love interest Chase Meridian (Nicole Kidman) and boy wonder Robin (Chris O'Donnell). Meridian, whose lovely, long, billowing hair makes her look like something out of a shampoo advert, is attracted to Batman, but not Bruce Wayne, who has the hots for her. Except she doesn't realise they're one and the same. It's *Lois & Clark* all over again!

As for O'Donnell's Robin, he's one of the most pleasant surprises of the film, being neither a whinging adolescent nor a smart-alec kid genius. A superb acrobat and member of trapeze troupe The Flying Graysons, he sees his parents and brother killed during Two-Face's unsuccessful attempt to locate Batman at a charity circus event, and promptly swears vengeance. Bruce Wayne takes him under his wing and, when Dick Grayson discovers his secret, Wayne tries (unsuccessfully) to persuade him not to follow the same path.

The supporting players are as good as the leads too. Even Two-Face's henchwomen Sugar and Spice (Drew Barrymore and Debi Mazar) aren't there for just glamorous decoration. And an audience chorus of "Not Alfred!" is guaranteed when the villains' gang knock down Michael Gough's venerable butler.

The production design is also stunning, replacing the film *trés noir* look of the previous two movies with a plethora of giant statues and enormous office blocks. It's like DW Griffith's *Intolerance* without the elephants! The sleek lines of the old batvehicles have been replaced by a new batmobile, batplane and batboat, which all look far more like, well, bats. And Edward Nygma's mind-control box, the prototype of which is built from a food-blender, becomes bigger and more commercial as his business progresses, but never stops looking like a blender.

There's no getting away from it – *Batman Forever* is cool and very satisfying, but only when you understand how Schumacher is treating his subject. *Dark Knight* purists may hate it, but to those who liked both the films and the TV series, this is an effective combination of both. If you ignore the badly composed action scenes and let yourself get carried along on by the batmania, you'll come out of the cinema aching to see what Schumacher (we hope) will do with the character in *Batman 4.*

(Left) Jim Carrey as Edward Nygma builds a mind-control device out of a food-blender...

(Right) Batman (Val Kilmer) and love interest Chase Meridan (Nicole Kidman)

A room of my own: Mr Edward Nygma says: "I settled on an overall 'question mark' motif to highlight the quizzical nature of my character. Mind you, dusting a ceiling this high is a bit of a sod..."

Val Kilmer in a tuxedo: We never knew he was such a dashing fellow...

"Danny Cannon has potential as an action movie director, but with *Dredd* he flounders..."

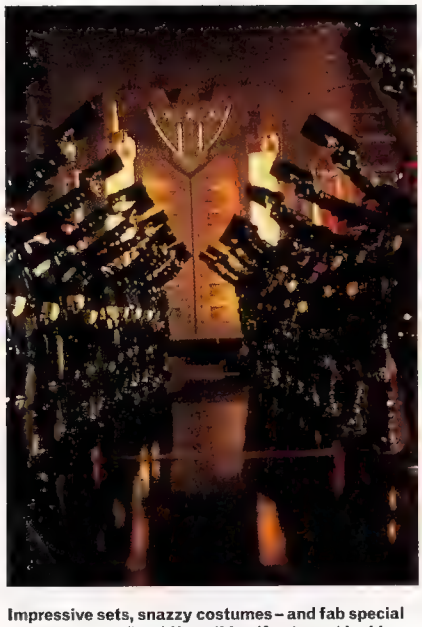
JUDGE DREDD

2000AD's most famous character gets the full Summer blockbuster treatment...

Studio: **Cinergi/Guild**
Director: **Danny Cannon**
Starring: **Sylvester Stallone, Armand Assante, Rob Schneider, Jurgen Prochnow, Diane Lane**
Cert: **15**
Running time: **95 mins**
Release: **Now showing**

Text: **Matt Bielby**

Remember how you felt when you first saw that Star Destroyer zoom overhead at the beginning of *Star Wars?* Or flew low over the smoke-stacks of 21st century Los Angeles in *Blade Runner?* Or watched the Blue Danube docking sequence from *2001* for the first time? Well, prepare to be knocked out all over again – *Judge Dredd* features some gob-smacking, state-of-the-art special effects. The first views of Mega City One at the beginning of the film, for instance, will send tingles down the spine of any Dredd fan.



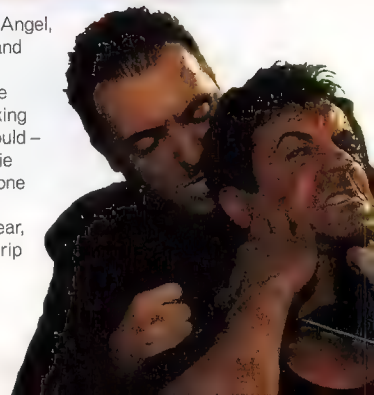
Impressive sets, snazzy costumes – and fab special effects. *Judge Dredd* is nothing if not great looking.

Scenes from the world of *Dredd*: Rico (Armand Assante) and Ilsa (Joan Chen) plot; Hershey (Diane Lane) fires; and Joe Dredd (Sly Stallone) plans his comeback.

The incredible full-scale ABC Warrior robot – one of the most amazing "characters" in the entire movie – gets the better of an understandably worried looking Hershey, while (below-right) Dredd and Rico fight it out as the film builds to its tragically weak clima

Hats off to Mass. Illusion – the New England effects house responsible for the film's stunning CGI cityscapes – then, and to production designer Nigel Phelps and his crew too. Their designs for the Grand Hall of Justice, the spaceships, guns and so on that make up *Judge Dredd's* world are never less than convincing, and often wonderful. Just to get to see the towering city blocks, Great West Wall, Mean Machine Angel, Hammerstein and other comic favourites in the flesh – and looking just as they should – makes the movie worthwhile on one level at least.

But, oh dear, the rest of it. Strip



More convincing than Dredd, Diane Lane's Hershey looks like she's stepped straight out of *2000AD*.

out the incredible backdrop, impressive sets and occasional stand-out sequence – the flying Lawmaster chase, a 1995 version of the bike bit from *Return of the Jedi,* springs immediately to mind – and what have you got? A very unimaginative set-the-hero-up-knock-him-down-and-let-him-fight-back thing – more *Rocky* than Judge Dredd – relying heavily on unlikely coincidences and littered with plot holes you could drive one of the movie's futuristic Land Rovers through. The structure's all over the place, there's no climax, and potentially promising elements – Mean Machine Angel, the battle with the Judge clones, and so on – are completely thrown away. And I haven't even begun to talk about Stallone's performance as Dredd yet...

Danny Cannon has some potential as an action movie director, and is getting better all the time – but with *Dredd* he flounders. The screenplay may once have been a good one, but by the final cut it's been hacked about and changed so much it doesn't even begin to make sense – don't get me started on the ludicrous nature of the "DNA tagged guns" evidence that gets Dredd convicted of a murder he plainly didn't commit. And clearly nobody involved had a proper idea of how to depict the iconic lead character. Even in the little details you get the feeling the film's taking the piss. At one point, for instance, to get back into Mega City One, Dredd and Fergie must run down a waste tunnel, through which fireballs burn every 30 seconds. One second they're running towards a fireball, the next they're running away from it. How come?

Performance-wise the film is varied. Armand Assante – as the Judge gone bad, Rico – is always watchable, although his motivations remain garbled, and he never makes as strong an impression as the main villain as he should. He slurs his words a bit too, which at least makes him a believable clone for Stallone. Diane Lane turns in a remarkably good Judge Hershey, but many of the other performances are either workmanlike (Prochnow) or just-this-side-of-annoying (Scheider as Fergie, the small-time criminal who helps Dredd out and provides much of the comedy relief).

And Stallone – Stallone is *dreadful.* Fully kitted up in the Judge uniform, he looks the part, sure, but then he opens his mouth. "Ah um the lawh!" he bellows early on. *"What?* What did he say?" mouth the audience to each other, and things don't get better. Punch-drunk, crying Rambo-like in anguish, he's a mixture of all his past heroic characters – Rocky Balboa, John Rambo and the rest. What he's *not* is Judge Dredd. It's a big problem that the film never recovers from.

Don't get me wrong – I'm not recommending you avoid *Judge Dredd.* Go and see it by all means. Mega City One may seem a little ordinary at street level – in a bid to avoid comparisons with *RoboCop,* the film-makers have stripped out all the madness and comedy elements that made MC1 in the comics so entertaining – but up in the sky it's amazing, the most perfectly realised future city in a film to date. The Japanese will love it, Stallone fans will enjoy Stallone being Stallone, and comic buffs will go nuts over the detail. It's yer common or garden punter I worry about. This isn't exciting or funny enough to go head-to-head with *Bad Boys* – let alone *Batman Forever* – as a good Saturday night out.

C

MIGHTY MORPHIN POWER RANGERS

Studio: **20th Century Fox**
Director: **Bryan Spicer**
Starring: **Jason David Frank, Amy Jo Johnson** (sigh), **Paul Freeman**
Cert: **PG**
Running time: **95 minutes**
Release: **Now showing**

Text: **Gary Whitta**

A new look for the Power Rangers; and even better action sequences and effects.

Brit Paul Freeman has a ball as the gleefully evil Ivan Ooze.

Kids' SF television has grown increasingly cynical over the last few years, degenerating into little more than lengthy adverts for toys and other spin-off merchandise, with anything approaching imaginative entertainment very thin on the ground indeed. That said, you can't help but have a grudging kind of respect for *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers,* the live-action series which stormed the children's TV ratings and became *the* hot commercial property of last year. Despite stories so shallow they wouldn't drown a gnat, and some of the most cringeworthy special effects since the heyday of Gerry Anderson, *Power Rangers* struck a nerve with kiddywinks worldwide through a neat blend of kung-fu action, scary over-the-top monsters, giant fighting robots and attractive teen-friendly characters.

The real success of *Power Rangers* isn't measured in terms of the show's ratings as much as the amount of merchandise sold, so it'd be easy to view this movie as just the latest in a string of cynical marketing exercises made by cigar-puffing, dollar-eyed executives. You might be surprised to hear, then, that it's actually very good indeed.

Yes, that's what I said. It's really good. Brilliant, in fact. Even Matt the Ed, having whinged about how shit it was going to be before the start, admitted afterwards that it was tops. You see, no-one over the age of 12 understands the appeal of the TV show, but it's got less to do with the low-rent execution than with the concept. With the show's shoestring budget catapulted to an impressive $30 million for this feature-length outing, things actually start to come together. The dialogue is snappier, the story more engaging (the fact that there's one at all is an improvement over the TV show), and the special effects are fantastic. Most impressively, the inevitable Godzilla-like monster robot confrontation at the end (in the TV version played out by embarrassingly bad men-in-suits) is awesome, the giant mechanical protagonists now generated by state-of-the-art computer graphics. Everything across the board, in fact, has been upgraded – the martial arts battles are humorously inventive in a Jackie Chan kind of way, the villains are nastier (Paul Freeman's gelatinous Ivan Ooze is a contender for Baddie of the Year), and Kimberly (Pink Ranger) is even more droolsome than before.

Sure, there are a few unintentional giggles along the way (inevitable in a movie aimed primarily at youngsters), but nevertheless this is 95 minutes of pure, unashamed fantasy action in the most entertaining tradition. I know what you're thinking, but believe me, you'll have a whale of a time.

B+

CGI-animated robots – now based on animals, not dinosaurs – replace the tacky TV series "Zords."

Rita Repulsa (Julia Cortez) and Lord Zedd (Mark Ginther) – the regular TV show foes – look understandably upset as Ivan Ooze steals the limelight.

CONGO

Distributor: **Paramount/UIP**
Director: **Frank Marshall**
Starring: **Dylan Walsh, Laura Linney, Ernie Hudson, Tim Curry**
Cert: **12**
Running time: **108 mins**
Release: **Now showing**

Text: **Dave Golder**

With a script based on a book by Michael "Midas" Crichton, and the pre-publicity banging on about the grey gorillas like they're the scariest thing since the Raptors in *Jurassic Park*, *Congo* promises much – but ultimately fails to satisfy.

Not that it's a complete waste of time. Indeed, things start off well enough, flitting between three seemingly unrelated plot strands, and throwing in a few off-the-peg environmental and emotional elements in an effort to make you care about the main characters. But soon it becomes painfully clear that such things have been introduced purely as plot devices. What you're left with is well-made, sporadically entertaining and often visually spectacular – but also shockingly hollow...

It's also surprisingly star-free. Dylan Walsh stars as Peter Elliot, a scientist who's trained an ape, Amy, to "talk" using sign language and (sigh) VR. He teams up with Karen Ross (Laura Linney) from the company that funds the expedition, and creepy Soviet explorer Herkermer Homolka (Tim Curry) – both of whom have less-than-philanthropic reasons for journeying to the Congo. Pretty soon, everyone's searching for the lost city of Zinj, where, diamond mines are guarded by ultra-brainy apes.

A lot of effort has gone into making this tosh convincing, and to a some extent it pays off. There's no saving the trite story – it's packed with plot holes – but director Frank *(Arachnophobia)* Marshall strives to make every scene as witty and spectacular as possible. Effects are impressive, and there are some neat stunts and action set-pieces.

The problem is, the film fails to establish a consistent style. It's not gung-ho enough to be *Indiana Jones*, and it's just too plain silly to be a decent thriller. Even when the killer gorillas do show up, every opportunity to give the film an edgy feel is wasted. They come across more like ravenous guard dogs than intelligent, reasoning creatures.

They don't even *look* that good. Make-up legend Stan Winston has created the most realistic men-in-suit primates to date – but they're still far from convincing. And although Amy's character's given the chance to develop a bit, it's hard to suspend disbelief during any of the scenes in which she appears. (Thankfully, all the simians are a damn sight more convincing than Tim Curry's bloody awful accent...)

C+

Pete Elliot (Dylan "never heard of 'im" Walsh) and Amy discuss sleeping arrangements after a hasty marriage.

© Rian Hughes

The month in FILM

FLICKS STILL SHOWING IN A CINEMA NEAR YOU, MOVIES COMING IN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER – OH, AND CHARTS...

Still playing

CASPER

Amblin/Universal

Director: **Brad Silberling**
Starring: **Christina Ricci, Bill Pullman, Cathy Moriarty, Eric Idle**
Cert: **PG**
Running time: **100 mins**
Text: **Matt Bielby**

While it's unashamedly a film for kids – so you've got to be a little lenient with the damn thing – *Casper* still comes across as about the most bare-faced piece of Hollywood audience manipulation in recent years.

Cute, lonely, rather cloying little boy ghost Casper lives with odious uncle ghosts in a haunted mansion, but when freelance ghostbuster Pullman and teenage daughter Ricci turn up to "ease them into the afterlife" all hell breaks loose. Special effects mixing cartoon characters with live action are amazing, but the nasty ghosts are unfunny, and the rest of the film very uneven. Christina Ricci (ex-child star of *The Addams Family* and *Mermaids)* is brilliant, however, and looks set to become a *very* big star.

C+

TALES FROM THE CRYPT PRESENTS DEMON KNIGHT

Universal

Director: **Ernest Dickerson**
Starring: **Billy Zane, William Sadler**
Cert: **18**
Running time: **93 mins**
Text: **Dave Golder**

It's usual in reviews to give a resumé of the plot, but *Demon Knight* hasn't got one. Rather, it's a pretty feeble excuse for chucking a load of gore and dumb jokes in your face. Billy Zane is the demonic villain who traps a motley bunch of folk in a boarding house, and then proceeds to eliminate them.

Presented like an episode of an anthology series (quite why is never explained), with opening and closing sequences presented by a spectacularly unfunny Crypt Keeper, the film proper comes across like a TV movie, but with all the gross-outs of a typical 18 horror flick.

All logic is jettisoned in favour of cheap laughs. It's desperately trying to be *Evil Dead,* but lacks any of the freshness or vitality of Raimi's butchered masterpiece. One for connoisseurs of convincing gore effects only (they're stomach-churningly well done, by the way).

C

(Right) One of Billy Zane's henchdemons from *Demon Knight.*

(Below) *Casper's* Christina Ricci learns dental hygiene the hard way.

Coming soon

Waterworld **11 August**
Costner, huge costs, ducks, etc.

Apollo 13 **22 September**
Bad luck, space, Tom Hanks...

Species **29 September**
SF horror flick, Giger nasty...

Candyman 2 **27 October**
Bees and meathooks – again.

Johnny Mnemonic **10 November**
Cyberthrills with Keanu Reeves.

IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS

Entertainment Film Distributors

Director: **John Carpenter**
Starring: **Sam Neill**
Cert: **15**
Running time: **95 mins**
Text: **Dave Golder**

Carpenter's latest is better than his more recent efforts, and manages to turn what's basically a half-hour *Twilight Zone* plot into an intriguing little shocker.

When a world-famous horror writing goes missing, insurance investigator Sam Neill gets called in to track him down – only to find himself in one of the novel's fictional towns where all manner of rubbery monster hokum is going down. A surreal plot, black humour and bizarre twists, along with an unusual ending, buoy up the low quality sfx.

B+

SF Movie Box Office

The Dark Knight Returns

On the biggest-grossing Stateside opening weekend in history, ***Batman Forever*** took a staggering $52,784,433. Beat that, ***Dredd!*** Meanwhile, kid spook-flick ***Casper*** and intelligent ape saga ***Congo*** both opened strongly just before the Dark Knight returned, while ***Outbreak*** is still hanging on there, and doing well in the European markets too. An unexpectedly high entry is ***Tales from the Hood*** – an interesting black horror anthology movie, featuring some terrific make-up effects and as-yet unscheduled for release in the UK – while James Herbert's canine reincarnation tale ***Fluke*** is also doing well. And (at last!) ***Stargate*** has nearly gone...

The SFXclusive Worldwide Top Ten SF Films

1. **Batman Forever** (US) Warner Bros
2. **Casper** (US) Paramount
3. **Congo** (US) Universal
4. **Johnny Mnemonic** (US) 20th Century Fox
5. **Outbreak** (US) Warner Bros
6. **Tales from the Hood** (US) Savoy
7. **Street Fighter** (US) Columbia Tristar
8. **Fluke** (US) MGM/UA
9. **The City of Lost Children** (France) Lumiere
10. **Stargate** (US) Guild

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3490 Judge Dredd Mean Angel
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3486 Judge Dredd Dredd & Mean
3577 Judge Dredd He is the LAW

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7430	J. Dredd Leather jacket				£149.99	£ .
7433	Judge Dredd poster set				£14.99	£
3544	Batman Metal badge				£10.00	£ .
3543	Batman Question mark				£10.00	£ .
3579	Judge Dredd & badge				£10.00	£ .
3605	Judge Dredd Lawgiver				£10.00	£ .
3490	Judge Dredd MEAN				£10.00	£ .
3578	Judge Dredd Lawmaster				£10.00	£ .
3569	Judge Dredd Torso				£10.00	£ .
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"Despite the lack of continuity, the episodes do build up a wonderfully mysterious atmosphere, with vague allusions to a fifth column of human collaborators or disguised aliens."

UFO

Anderson's first live actioner has a lot going for it, despite the purple wigs...

Production company: **ITC**
Producer: **Gerry Anderson**
Starring: **Ed Bishop, George Sewell**
Showing: **Bravo, Thursdays, 6.30pm; Sundays, 5pm**

Text: **John Gosling**

If Fox Mulder were to undergo a timewarp and find himself in the company of *UFO*'s commander Straker (Ed Bishop), would the two see eye to eye? Doubtful. After all, SHADO (Supreme Headquarters Alien Defence Organisation) was dedicated to covering up an alien invasion, and used dubious methods – including drugs – to make sure its operations stayed decidedly covert.

Cold-blooded murder, however, doesn't seem to have been an option – and in any case those who stumbled on the truth could always be recruited. This is just what happens in the excellent episode "Exposed," which serves to explain the origins of SHADO's Paul Foster (Michael Billington), a maverick test pilot whose aircraft strays into the middle of a UFO incident. It's a complex study in paranoia by Tony Barwick (who wrote some of the best episodes), depicting conspiracies in high places, and predates *The X-Files* by 25 years.

As Gerry Anderson's first live-action series, *UFO* was the butt of many jokes, although this was more the fault of the harsh make-up and dodgy costumes than any great acting deficiencies. Don't let anyone tell you the lurid purple wigs worn by the female Moonbase staff had protective properties, it was simply "Century 21 Fashion" designer Sylvia Anderson's insightful premonition that wigs would form as much a part of uniforms in the future as caps and jackets do now.

The uniforms in *UFO* certainly took full advantage of the female figure, but what could easily be seen as sexist exploitation actually works well, if only because, despite looking like the chorus line from some seedy Lunar saloon, the Moonbase operatives played it dead straight, and as such were on a reasonably equal footing with the men.

Despite the show's lack of real continuity, the episodes do build up a wonderfully mysterious atmosphere, with vague allusions to a fifth column of human collaborators or disguised aliens, and ambiguities concerning the true physical nature of the invaders. The first episode, "Identified," for example, cleverly establishes that the aliens breathe a liquid solution to cushion them from high accelerations, thus accounting for their green skin. The surreal episode "Cat With Ten Lives," however, in which a cat possessed by an alien mind has free run of the SHADO HQ, suggests the aliens could be incorporeal entities too.

Ed Straker (Ed Bishop) seeks solace in the bar after a particularly taxing day at the office...

The HQ was hidden beneath the Harlington-Straker film studios, which formed a fascinating backdrop for several episodes, including Barwick's brilliant "Mindbender," another surreal story, in which exposure to a hallucinogenic alien drug amplifies subconscious fears and stresses, deluding Straker into thinking his life to date has been nothing more than a role in a movie.

Most episodes maintain this high standard of plotting, even though some do plod slightly. And while I still can't quite see how the spinning top UFO effect was so effectively achieved, I do wonder why SHADO was so confident of hitting them it armed its interceptors with only one missile each. Nonetheless, 26 hours of classic Anderson...

SPACE: ABOVE AND BEYOND

Production Company: **20th Century Fox**
Starring: **Morgan Weisser, Kristen Cloke, Rodney Rowland**
Showing: **Sky One, 20 minutes into the future...**
(Reviewed from a rough cut without credits and some special effects.)

Text: **Jon Abbott**

"In space, no-one can hear you scream... unless it is the battle cry of the US Marine Corps!" bellows a training sergeant straight out of every bad army film ever made in the only half-funny line in the pilot for *Space*, the disappointing new series from *X-Files* wizards Glen Morgan and James Wong.

Convinced they are alone in the universe, the Earth of 2140 colonises space, only to be told in the most violent manner that humanity is not welcome... *Space: Above and Beyond* begins like the famous "Arena" episode of *Star Trek,* but is about as anti-*Star Trek* as you can get, taking us firmly back to the reactionary paranoia of *Battlestar Galactica* and *Buck Rogers* and his Draconians.

Visually, the future is convincing. It looks lived-in, true enough, but without the sterility of *2001* or the worn-out look of *Dark Star.* In fact,

Nathan West (Morgan Weisser) and Cooper Hawkes (Rodney Rowland) star in this gritty, yet clichéd, sci-fi series.

Morgan and Wong have made no attempt to portray the Earth of the future at all. If anything, it looks and sounds a little *too* much like the present in terms of vehicles, rock music, and clothing. Plotwise, it's pure space opera, packed with every hoary old war film cliché going. No wonder the aliens are faceless and motiveless...

The lead characters are Nathan West, a would-be coloniser turned Marine to avenge the death/disappearance of his girlfriend, Shane Vansen, a hardened young woman who saw her Marine parents brutally executed in an earlier war, and Cooper Hawkes, one of the artificially bred In Vitros brought parentless into this world to fight the war when young bodies started running out. (Admittedly, the one positive thing about *Space* is that the women are genuinely equal to the men – although chauvinists will be pleased to hear that the one crying scene goes to the female lead; the guys just clench their jaws a lot.)

Oddly for a US TV environment where audiences respond positively to bright and optimistic themes, *Space* comes across as rather sad and despondent fare. From the slaughter of the innocents in the opening scenes (it's tough to figure whether Morgan and Wong's shots of TV commercial families with cute kids and dogs on the doomed colony is parodic, clumsily "meaningful" or just crass) to the bigotry shown towards In Vitro "Tanks" bred for war and then discarded when the conflict is over, *Space* is unrelentingly bleak.

It might be argued that the world is a tough place, and that looking over the history of the human race, some things never change – humankind in the 22nd century will be just as brutal, bigoted and barbaric as it is in the 20th century. But the thing is, despite all the horror and ugliness, the latter half of the 20th century has shown considerable intellectual and spiritual advancement. For *Space* to work as a series, the world has to be worth saving... If we haven't progressed beyond the phoney machismo of shows like this by then, my sympathies will be entirely with the aliens.

B

SLIDERS

Production Company: **MCA Universal**
Starring: **Jerry O'Donnell, Sabrina Lloyd, John Rhys-Davies, Cleavant Derricks**
Showing on: **US TV now; Sky One soon**

Text: **Jon Abbott**

American TV has been trying to make amends for the demise of *The Time Tunnel* since it was taken prematurely off air 30 years ago. Alongside *The Fugitive, Star Trek,* and *The Invaders,* Irwin Allen's extraordinary concept remains one of the most revisited premises in TV sci-fi history.

So, following such variable attempts to plunder temporal games as *Star Trek's* "The City on the Edge of Forever," *The Time Travellers, The Time Machine* TV movie, *Fantastic Journey, Time Express, Voyagers, Otherworld, Quantum Leap, Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventures* and *Doorways* comes *Sliders,* a wonderfully imaginative and intriguing series about parallel worlds that recalls and expands on earlier romps through revisionist histories in the new *Twilight Zone* and others, but which has been sadly cancelled after just a handful of episodes.

If there's one thing I enjoy more than a time travel story, it's a change history/parallel world story. Alternate world yarns are great fun, and *Sliders* is full of them. In the course of its short run, Einstein sabotages the Manhattan Project, Elvis lives, America loses the War Of Independence and becomes a monarchy, the US succumbs to communism, plague, a new Ice Age, and – in the oldest SF cliché in the book – to militant feminism. So why was it cancelled? My guess is because of the characters, four travellers who "slide" from one alternate reality to another.

Jerry O'Donnell is okay as the boyish lead, but a grown man would have been better, and wouldn't have so alienated the adult audience. You see, as fun as it is, *Sliders* is still pretty much juvenilia. And while John Rhys-Davies is well-cast as the typical blustering scientist Professor Arturo, he's a little overplayed and one-dimensional, and not enough to save *Slider's* from its remaining characters. Certainly, it needs saving from the patronising, dated and clichéd Rembrandt Brown, played by Cleavant Derricks, who stands out like a sore thumb to such an extent that he might as well have a huge sign hanging round his neck saying "Black America, Please Watch." An insultingly obvious attempt to shoehorn an ethnic touch into the demographic mix, Derricks' perky, self-centred Philly soul singer is so wrong he might as well have been played by a white man in blackface, a condescending throwback to the crassest of early '70s tokenism.

Poor Sabrina Lloyd as sidekick Wade Wells doesn't fare much better. In the episode sent to me for review, as male hero Quinn Mallory (O'Donnell) races against time to reconstruct the "sliding" device that will save their butts from destruction,

Maximillian Arturo (John Rhys-Davies), Quinn Mallory (Jerry O'Connell), and Wade Wells (Sabrina Lloyd) look suitably bemused in the ill-fated *Sliders...*

Wells wants to take time out to talk about their "feelings..." In another, with a comet hurtling towards Earth promising death in 24 hours, Mallory's cautious romantic overtures are responded to by a coyly demure turning of the head! Women must be sorely tired of seeing themselves portrayed like this. A brainless heavy-metal headbanging type reminiscent of *Bill and Ted* also appears to be a recurring character.

Such heavy-handedness is surprising, given the reputations of the people involved. John Landis and Robert Weiss (whose previous stabs at TV fantasy include *Weird Science* and *Eerie Indiana)* produce, while the series' creator is Tracy Torme, who gave us the flawed *Intruders* mini-series and made much noise about how his episodes of *Star Trek: TNG* were wrecked by others. Who's to blame for this, then, Tracy?

B

The month in TV

MORE RECENT GENRE (AND GENRE-RELATED) TV FROM THE PAST MONTH, INCLUDING SEASON TWO OF THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN, PLUS COMING SOON ON TV AND THE SFX TOP TEN.

THE ADVENTURES OF BATMAN AND ROBIN

Warner Brothers

Starring: **Loads and loads of animated cels**
Showing: **ITV, Saturday mornings (during *Scratchy and Co*)**
Text: **James Duggan**

The cartoon Batman's back, and thankfully shorn of the tedious social conscience that marred a few episodes in series one. Absurdly, Warner has dropped the fantastically atmospheric title sequence and replaced it with an aimless montage of Bats and Robin, notable only for the astonishingly bad cutting which at one point appears to have Batman landing in front of a villain and shooting the bat-grapple in his face. But, hey, despite orders from the people on high to lighten up (more Robin, less tortured madblokeness), Batman is still as magnificently unpleasant as ever.

Warner' smart idea was to promote Paul Dini, easily the first series' best writer, to producer for season two – and the four episodes shown so far have been excellent. Two-Face, Poison Ivy and the (up until now shamefully wasted) Riddler have all been given starring roles in consistently classily animated, excitingly dark tales of criminal woe. (The fourth episode, "Trial," was first choice for the film that eventually became *Mask of the Phantasm* – the entire Rogues' Gallery takes over Arkham and puts Bats on trial for turning them into monsters. Neat.)

Curiously, the censors appear to have repealed season one's inviolable rules: Recognisable AK47s and pistols have replaced the safely obsolete and fabulously stylish Thompsons, and in "Second Chance" gangsters actually fire directly at Batman. The topper so far has come in "House and Garden," at the end of which Poison Ivy directs her almost-human plant children to kill Bats – only to see them dissolve horrifically in weedkiller.

It's good to see a studio believing that a cartoon can work as drama. And with upcoming episodes featuring the returns of Mr Freeze, The Clock King, Harley Quinn and Catwoman, a tale about Alfred's past as a top MI5 agent and new villains, such as murderous ex-child star Baby Doll, you'd do well to tune in. Forget the feeble first two films – this is the *real* Batman.

A⁻

THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN

SEASON TWO

3rd December Productions

Starring: **Dean Cain, Teri Hatcher**
Showing: **BBC 1, Saturday nights, times vary**
Text: **Dave Golder**

It's a dumb idea, the effects are dismal and the hero looks a complete prat in costume – and yet, somehow, *Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* has developed into one of the most consistently enjoyable series of the last decade. The first season was a bit of a sleeper hit, but the second, just drawing to a close on BBC 1, has managed to consolidate and build on that success.

The move away from using Lex Luthor as the main villain every week was a wise one, and a variety of new adversaries has added plenty of colour and camp humour. But while the tone of the show has loosened up, characters like the Prankster never seem to go quite far enough – the series seems to be crying out for more colourful *Batman*-style nasties.

Superman stops a fairground attraction going into overdrive...

Still, at least they know how to make the most of what they've got – both Hatcher and Cain have spent a good deal of time this season is various states of undress, and their relationship has stepped up a notch too. Indeed, towards the end of the season, the will-they/won't-they sub-plot has become far more important (and certainly more interesting) than the main stories in things like "Target: Jimmy Olsen" and "Whine, Whine, Whine."

One of the best things about the season, however, has been the superb supporting cast. Lane Smith still provides the best version of Perry White ever, and memorable guest appearances from Denise (Tasha Yar) Crosby, as Luther's Madame Ex, and Bruce Campbell as crime boss Bill Church Jnr liven things up no end. Even relatively minor players – like Jimmy's girlfriend Sarah in "Target: Jimmy Olsen" – have been given enough quirkiness to make them more than just plot devices. Only the new, hunkier Jimmy (Justin Whalin) has been something of a disappointment.

Highlights of the season include a bald Luthor in "The Phoenix," the unusually downbeat two-parter "Lucky Leon/Resurrection," and the hilarious "Tempus Fugitive." Stacked next to these, weak aspects of the show seem like minor stuff, although the irritating "That Old Gang of Mine" (the '30s gangsters brought back to life episode) was pretty dire, and certain repeated plot elements are starting to get old fast. Special effects continue to be naff too, and I'm fed up with Cain waving his cloak into the camera to signify Superman taking off all the time. Still, minor niggles – and I can't wait for season three...

B⁺

Coming soon

Cult TV Weekend
Bravo **5-6 August**
Featuring episodes of *The Time Tunnel, Sapphire and Steel, Twilight Zone, UFO* and *Space: 1999* (as well as, oddly enough, the film *Last Exit to Brooklyn*).

Star Trek: Voyager
Sky One **October**
If you don't want to risk money on the vids, you're only going to have to wait a few more months until you can see *Voyager* in the UK (unless you haven't got a satellite dish, that is... Still no news about a terrestrial showing).

Space: Above and Beyond
Sky One **October**
Turning up in the UK a stunningly short time after its US transmission, *Space: Above and Beyond* looks like it's going to have a hard time making an impression over here (see previous page).

VR-5 **October**
Sky One
Cancelled in the States before we ever got to see it. Will this European showing lead to a *Baywatch*-type resurrection? Probably not.

Earth 2 **October**
Sky One
A '90s take on *Lost in Space* – but nowhere near as (unintentionally) funny. Another one that's already gone down the dumper in the US.

SF Weekend
August Bank Holiday Weekend
Channel 4
These SF weekends are getting a bit popular, aren't they? Channel 4's extravaganza starts with coverage of Intersection, the World's largest SF convention, which takes place over the weekend, and then goes on to broadcast some classic sci-fi, including *Soylent Green, Outland* and *The Man Who Fell to Earth,* and a classic episode from *Babylon 5.*

SF TV Top Ten

The Summer Slump...

The Outer Limits slides steadily down the ratings, now regularly achieving lower figures than ***Star Trek: The Next Generation***, which is being shown in a much lower-profile slot. ***Bugs*** rallied towards the end of the season and the BBC has clearly been pleased enough with the figures – it's already given the go ahead for a second season. Schedule fillers like ***Time Trax*** and ***Knight Rider*** only make a decent showing because there's so little alternative genre stuff on terrestrial TV, while ***The X-Files*** is the outright winner on satellite. Figures are based on average viewing figures throughout the month of June.

The SFXclusive UK Top Ten SF TV Programmes

1. **Bugs** (BBC 1)
2. **The New Adventures of Superman** (BBC 1)
3. **Star Trek: The Next Generation** (BBC 2)
4. **seaQuest DSV** (ITV)
5. **The Outer Limits** (BBC 2)
6. **Buck Rogers in the 25th Century** (BBC 2)
7. **Knight Rider** (ITV)
8. **Time Trax** (ITV)
9. **Power Rangers** (GMTV)
10. **The X-Files** (Sky One)

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"As with everything that involves time travel, *Timecop's* storyline writhes like an eel – and, as usual, you can pick most of it to pieces."

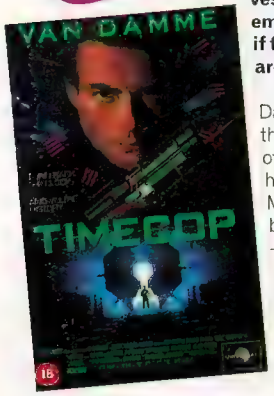
TIMECOP

The famous, buttock-baring Belgian's attempts to topple Stallone et al continue...

Distributor: **CIC Video**
Director: **Peter Hyams**
Starring: **Jean-Claude Van Damme, Ron Silver, Mia Sara**
Cert: **18**
Release: **Out now** (rental)
Running time: **94 mins**

Text: **Jonathan Davies**

Why, whenever a good guy gets gunned down, does he then always have to prop himself up on his elbows, groan a bit, and unbutton his shirt to reveal a bullet-proof vest with the bullets embedded in it? Even if there's no-one else around to see it?



Jean-Claude Van Damme does exactly this near the beginning of *Timecop*. At the time, he's a policeman called Max Walker, who's just been shot by hoodlums – who then go along to blow his house up, along with his wife (Mia Sara from *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*). Why they should want to

JC's cooking reaches that critical point when two hands just aren't enough. Or, alternatively, he daringly defies death once again.

(Left) You may find yourself asking for a plain wrapper, but *Timecop* really isn't that bad. Honestly.

do this doesn't become apparent until ten years later, when time travel has been invented and Max is now an agent for the Time Enforcement Commission, charged with preventing criminals from meddling with the past. His would-be assassins were, it turns out, sent back in time by the ruthless Senator McComb (Ron Silver), who's trying to buy his way into the White House using stolen time travel technology.

That's the simple version, anyway. As with everything else involving time travel, *Timecop's* storyline writhes like an eel. McComb goes back into the past to get up to no good, except that Walker's anticipated him and got there first, except McComb's anticipated him anticipating him, and so on. And, as usual, you can pick most of it to pieces. (Wait, he left the paper from 2004 back in 1929 where anyone could find it. And why didn't he carry a gun when he knew he was going to be attacked at his house?)

But you're not allowed to worry about such things until afterwards, thanks to a tight conspiracy sub-plot (Has Walker's boss and best friend been bought by McComb or not?) and the inevitable fight sequences. Van Damme truly comes into his own with a monkey wrench, and his ballet training pays off when he has to avoid an electrified pool of water on his kitchen floor. All this is enhanced by the excellent sounds effects, with uppercuts and spinning bird kicks you can really feel, and some highly desirable electric-powered weaponry.

Rather more disappointing is *Timecop's* Vision Of The Future. When I saw it at the cinema the audience was in hysterics as Van Damme pulled up in his Car Of Tomorrow – a Car Of Today with several cardboard boxes sellotaped onto it and sprayed white. And what's going on with that time capsule? To travel into the past, TEC agents sit in a pod which must then be accelerated to high speed. Rocket engines fire up and it zooms off down the track, its passengers going "Aaarrgh!" as they're thrusted to at least 25mph. Much is made of the bloodstains on the large concrete wall ahead of them, the remains of agents who didn't make it. So why have the wall there in the first place? Surely, a sand trap would have been far more sensible (and certainly a lot cleaner too)...

Timecop is undoubtedly second-grade material. But it's never dull, and boasts one or two good lines and plenty of enjoyable action sequences. If *Stargate* can manage a D-, *Timecop's* definitely looking at a... B

INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE

Distributor: **Warner Bros**
Director: **Neil Jordan**
Starring: **Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise, Kirsten Dunst**
Cert: **18**
Release: **Out now** (rental)
Running time: **118 mins**

Text by: **Dan Goodleff**

There you are, eternally young, eternally beautiful, the world your feeding ground – and what do you do? Okay, there are a few provisos, like don't step into the sunlight and an incessant craving for blood, but apart from that it's pretty much the life of Reilly. Unless you're Brad Pitt, that is. In which case, you moan. And moan...

Interview's like Merchant Ivory with fangs, but without the daylight and a simpering Helena

Tom Cruise may get top billing, but this is Brad Pitt's film...

Louis (Brad Pitt) goes AWOL with a scythe after Claudia forgets to slap on the factor 50...

Bonham Carter. An adaptation of Anne Rice's 20 year old novel, it's been stylishly transferred to the screen by *The Crying Game* director Neil Jordan.

Told in flashback to disbelieving reporter Christian Slater, Louis (Brad Pitt), a New Orleans plantation owner from the 18th century, tells how he makes a Faustian pact with vampire Lestat (Tom Cruise). The price – an eternal craving for blood. Forever at odds with his vampiric desires – which take on a decidedly erotic tinge – Louis whinges, while Lestat taunts him mercilessly. When Louis considers going his own way to seek the meaning of it all, Lestat turns an orphaned child Claudia (Kirsten Dunst) into his companion to keep him in check.

Soon, Lestat is betrayed by his protegés, and Claudia and Louis, apparently free at last, make their way to Paris to find out more about "their kind." There they run into Armand (Antonio Banderas) and his troupe of vamps, who feed on mortals in front of an unsuspecting and ironically appreciative human audience. Here Louis hopes to find the peace that has eluded him for so long...

If you can put up with the sluggish pace (there are few labour-inducing shocks, so expectant mothers can rest easy) and erratic script, *Interview* is a sensuous and evocative movie that's miles better than the book on which it's based. Pitt is necessarily glum throughout, but at least he provides a firm centre around which the more characterful Claudia, Lestat and Armand can weave their spell. It's just a shame Banderas doesn't get a more pivotal role, because he has the kind of charisma Cruise's Lestat lacks. Visually it's ravishing, though – opulent and gloomy – and boasting a dark tone offset by some black humour that only occasionally grates. A powerful, if overlong, tale of lust and long hair (despite the naff Hollywood ending). A-

NEEDFUL THINGS

Distributor: **Polygram**
Director: **Fraser C Heston**
Starring: **Max Von Sydow, Ed Harris, Amanda Plummer**
Cert: **15**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **128 mins**
Price: **£10.99**

Text: **Stuart Campbell**

You know what would be *really* scary? A horror film where the Devil came to town and did all kinds of scary Devil stuff *on a bright, sunny Summer's day*. It hardly seems credible these days that a director could still go "Hey, I've had this great idea! Why not make everything in the movie happen at night, and *in the middle of a thunderstorm?* And, heck, why not chuck in an exploding church too?"

Ed Harris and Amanda Plummer get what they ask for – and a lot more besides...

No such bright and sunny terror with *Needful Things*, I'm afraid. Here, all the spooky bits go "Aargh!" in deathly darkness, with lightning flashing and *Omen*-style choral singing swelling in the background, just in case you didn't know something scary or spooky was about to happen. The film was almost halfway through before I finally decided it *wasn't* trying to be a satire.

Luckily, I hadn't missed anything by then. *Needful Things* spends its first hour telling you the basic plot (already firmly spelled out on the back of the video box) seven or eight times, managing to make it sound less plausible each time. In short, Old Nick comes to Nowheresville, America, as an avuncular Mr Benn-type shopkeeper, and turns the stupid and nasty townsfolk against each other with the kind of manipulative skills that would embarrass an eight-year-old. Luckily, the sheriff (a veteran cop from The Big City, obviously) saves the day just before the entire town goes up in flames (the second hour is just a string of unlikely double murders and an inexplicable riot) and everything's peachy again, except that – shock, no! – Beelzebub escapes in a surprise ending. Eek.

It really is that lame, and although Max Von Sydow as the Devil gets a couple of good lines – "You might say that I am, well, non-denominational," he replies to one of the town's two feuding priests when he enquires as to which faith Von Sydow follows – even he's hamming it up like someone who really doesn't need the money. The makers of this drivel certainly don't need any of yours. D-

Reviewers: James Duggan (JD), Dave Golder (DG), Mike Simpson (MS), Matt Bielby (MB), Matt Evans (ME)

VISION ON

THE FIRST BATCH OF VIDS FROM WARNER BROS' TWO NEW CULT MOVIE LABELS BEYOND VISION AND TERROR VISION BOAST OCCASIONAL WIDESCREEN RELEASES, A SMATTERING OF ORIGINAL TRAILERS AND COLLECTORS' CARDS. BUT WHAT ABOUT THE FILMS THEMSELVES? SFX GOES INTO A REVIEWS FRENZY.

BEYOND VISION
THE FIRST BATCH

"Are you sure the map's up the right way?"

At the Earth's Core (Dir: Kevin Connor, 1976, Cert PG, £9.99) Barely 11 minutes elapse before Peter Cushing and Doug McClure are whisked off by their errant Victorian steam excavator to a ravishingly orange lost world, ruled by telepathic pteranodons. The pace is thus set for the rest of this half-baked monster pic – a film where, in lieu of a plot, the actors keep running past the same bit of the set, plummy Cushing gets the best lines and McClure spars for Caroline Munro, shaking his hair defiantly at camera amid some horrendous prehistoric wigs. (**JD**) D+

Batman (Widescreen, dir: Tim Burton, 1989, Cert 15, £12.99) Easily superior to Tim Burton's second *Batman* film, the original remains a classy act – good-looking, packed with snappy one-liners, and enough of a visual feast to just about get away with the unfathomable casting of comedian Michael Keaton as Bats. Jack Nicholson's Joker dominates (indeed, almost unbalances) the film, but the biggest problems are the lack of a decent climax and the hopelessly un-acrobatic stand-there-and-punch-people fight scenes. (**MB**) B

Batman Returns (Widescreen, dir: Tim Burton, 1992, Cert 15, £12.99) I hated this when I first saw it – all that shouting, all that melodrama, all that overblown gothic stuff – but after seeing it again on video it's really not *that* bad. Danny De Vito's performance as the Penguin, despite some decent lines, remains grinding, and we get no further into the psychology of Batman/Bruce Wayne than we did in the first film, but Michelle Pfeiffer's Catwoman looks great and has some good scenes. Deliberately stylised, fairytale sets remove all sense of tension or reality from the proceedings, though, and tend to confirm my opinion of Tim Burton as the most over-rated director currently working. (**MB**) C

Prrrrrrr, and, indeed, miaooow. Ahem.

Blade Runner Director's Cut (Widescreen, dir: Ridley Scott, 1982/91, Cert 15, £12.99) The problem with *Blade Runner* is that its visuals have been imitated by so many films, it's lost a lot of its original impact. Giant, grimy futuristic buildings covered in advertising and stacked layer upon layer on top of each other are very familiar now – just look at *Judge Dredd*. That said, this is much more intelligent than any of its imitators, and the letterbox presentation shows off the immaculate production design to good effect. The Director's Cut lets the *noir*-ish story unfold at its own pace, and thankfully drops a few more hints about what the hell's actually going on too. An over-familiar classic. (**MB**) A

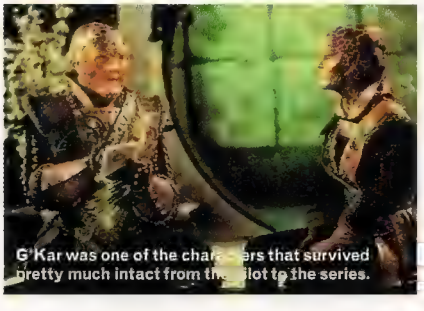
Mad Max (Widescreen, dir: George Miller, 1979, Cert 18, £12.99) If you've only ever seen this manic slice of

BABYLON 5
THE PILOT

Distributor: **Warner/Beyond Vision**
Director: **Richard Compton**
Starring: **Michael O'Hare, Jerry Doyle, Tamlyn Tomita, Peter Jurasik, Mira Furlan**
Cert: **PG**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **90 mins**
Price: **£9.99**

Multi-race politics, space battles, cyber-technology, and a dash of philosophy – right from the start, JM Straczynski clearly outlines his themes for *Babylon 5*...

Plenty of characters are introduced, the ones making the biggest impact being tortured station commander Jeffrey Sinclair (O'Hare), maverick security chief Michael Garibaldi (Doyle), and the various alien ambassadors, who provide most of the political machinations. Despite the potential complication, it all works too – both as a curtain-raiser and a piece of entertainment.



G'Kar was one of the characters that survived pretty much intact from the pilot to the series.

The pilot deals with the opening of the station, which draws all the characters together. On finally arriving, Ambassador Kosh of the Vorlon Empire is mysteriously struck down, and the main suspect is a resident of Babylon 5. Fingers point in various directions, as the investigation reveals new technology, political intrigue and roots reaching back to the Earth/Minbari war and beyond.

For the most part, the basic elements that make up the series are introduced well, including the characterisation of the main protagonists, the concepts behind the new technology and the various alien races. Where it works best is in the creation of atmosphere – this launch episode has a dark ambience, accomplished graphics, strong characters and explores some neat SF premises. Shame it took until season two for the series itself to catch up... (**ME**) B

The make-up team that worked on the pilot weren't used for the series – though the basic make-up designs remained pretty much intact.

motorised mayhem in squished-up pan-and-scan format, you owe it to yourself to have a gander at the letterbox version. It looks like a completely different (and much more expensive) film. The plot might not be up to much – Mel Gibson is the leather-clad traffic cop of the near future who, after seeing his best mate, wife and kids get killed by a group of bikers, becomes an auto-vigilante – but it's the spirit of the thing that counts, and it's hard to think of a better excuse for a load of car crashes (though Mad Max 2 comes to mind). (**DG**) B

Westworld (Widescreen, dir: Michael Crichton, 1973, Cert 15, £12.99) Almost an hour into this movie – so far an episode of *Alias Smith and Jones*, intercut with frolicking businessmen and tourist Richard Benjamin asking loaded questions about safety – you desperately want the robots to go wrong. Understatement's all very well, but when the breakdown/revolt does occur and everyone's killed off in a few minutes, you're left with little but peeved electric gunslinger Yul Brynner chasing Benjamin around for a bit. With long stretches of behind-the-scenes techno-tedium, painful logical lapses and a farcically overdone ending *Westworld* is ultra-light entertainment that barely stretches to its unusually short running

Sunbathing in a balaclava is bad for you.

time. That it's a Widescreen version, with trailer, helps not a jot. (**JD**) C

TERROR VISION
THE HORROR BEGINS...

Frankenstein Unbound (Dir: Roger Corman, 1990, Cert 18, £14.99) Corman's post-wilderness return to the director's chair is an odd mixture. More accessible – but less thought-provoking – than Brian Aldiss' excellent novel, it throws John Hurt's accidental time-traveller into a mixture of Mary Shelley's novel and the oft-quoted real-life situation in which she wrote it. The European scenery is lush, the costumes are colourful, Hurt's talking car is irritating and, quite frankly, the whole thing never quite gels. On the plus side, Nick Brimble plays the only Frankenstein monster I've ever seen who is actually ugly enough to frighten people. With trailer. (**MS**) C+

It (Dir: Tommy Lee Wallace, 1990, Cert 15, £10.99) Child actors get a rum deal nowadays, but in *It* seven newcomers excel as a gang of misfits out to stop the gleefully evil monster clown Pennywise, who's killing the other kids in their '50s home town. This part of the story's gripping, unusually grim for a TV movie, and packed with good effects and scares. It's a pity, though, that the childhood shocks are just an extended flashback from the main story, in which the gang reforms when Pennywise returns in the '80s. By now they've grown into adults so irksome you instantly side with the monster. This section's sappy and badly acted. Switch off halfway through. (The clown loses.) (**JD**) B-

Can I interest you in some blood?

Taste the Blood of Dracula (Dir: Peter Sasdy, 1969, Cert 15, £10.99) Christopher Lee is resurrected by Victorian Lord Ralph Bates with the help of three upper-class hypocrites. Bates (his first film role, interestingly enough) dies in the process, and the other three are thereafter novelly despatched by the Count, and at the hands/teeth of their vampirised daughters. It's pretty good Hammer fare and a great way to spend 92 minutes on a Friday night in front of the box. Provided you taped it off TV, that is, because this video – like the previous UK video release – is cut by four minutes, and essential plot points, like each victim seeing Dracula before they die, just aren't there. Uncut, I would give this a B; in this state, I can find no reason to recommend it. (**MS**) D

To the Devil a Daughter (Peter Sykes, 1976, Cert 18, £10.99) Incomprehensible, determinedly repellent Hammer Horror with occultist Richard Widmark impersonating a private eye and battling satanist Christopher Lee for shrill "chosen one" Natassja Kinski. The film's well made and spooky, but stupid and, as a mid-'70s picture, obliged to be unpleasantly graphic. Watching it is an ordeal, and not even the amazing amount of telephone scenes (or the fact the spawn of Satan is clearly being kept in the baby isolator from *The Meaning of Life*) can help. (**JD**) D

The Wicker Man (Dir: Robin Hardy, 1973, Cert 18, £10.99) This tale of paganism on a remote Scottish isle still stands as one of the best British horror films ever made. Edward Woodward is excellent as the policeman whose puritanical Christian beliefs are affronted by the islanders' religion, and the be-kilted Christopher Lee is great as the local Lord. But like every previous UK video release, this is the 85-minute version, missing the essential pre-credit sequence – shown on TV – which establishes Woodward's religious zeal and virginity. It rather makes this re-

The Wicker Man in virgin death shock.

release pointless. Comes with collectors' cards. (**MS**) C+

Wolfen (Dir: Michael Wadleigh, 1981, Cert 18, £14.99) Ludicrous eco-thriller in which cynical detective Albert Finney teams up with psychologist Diane Venora to find out who's attacking New York socialites. It turns out to be a pack of "wolfen," 20,000 year-old Indian wolf gods who kill to protect their hunting ground. Gregory Hines's pathologist is fine (he's first seen explaining how long a head lives after decapitation), but the rest of the cast appears uncomfortable with the material. James Horner was later to recycle his score for *Aliens*. Widescreen version, with trailer and collectors' cards. (**JD**) D

FORBIDDEN PLANET

Distributor: **Warner/Beyond Vision**
Director: **Fred M Wilcox**
Starring: **Leslie Nielsen, Walter Pidgeon**
Cert: **U**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **98 mins**
Price: **£14.99**

Walter Pigeon demonstrates that Robby cannot harm living beings.

This was the film that inspired Gene Roddenberry to create *Star Trek* – but let's not hold that against it. In many ways it's a landmark flick – one that provided a blueprint for the countless SF movies and TV series that followed.

Forbidden Planet is undoubtedly one of the finest SF films ever made. Unashamedly using Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as its basic premise, it's a superb blend of drama, broad characterisation and good, honest SF. Only a few rather naive ideas about what it is to be human date the thing at all.

Leslie Nielsen stars as Commander Adams, the captain of a military spaceship sent to Altair IV to discover what's happened to an earlier expedition. When he arrives, he discovers only two survivors – Doctor Morbius (Walter Pigeon) and his daughter Altaira (Anne Francis). The others died one by one, years before, destroyed by a mysterious planetary force – and Morbius fears Adams' arrival could trigger off similar events. What Adams needs to know is how Morbius and Altaira escaped death – and how the doctor has managed to build a robot which is centuries ahead of Earth technology. Matters are complicated when Adams falls for Altaira, at which point all hell's let loose...

Sure, some of the cod psychology is hard to take – and the film does tend to fall back on talky, expository scenes – but at its heart is a solid, intelligently-developed plot, based on an intriguing idea. Best of all, though, *Forbidden Planet* is jam-packed with stunningly memorable images – like the monster from the Id, or the massive Krel machinery beneath the planet's surface – still mightily impressive even by today's sfx standards.

This Widescreen version enhances the majesty of many of these images as often as it reveals the staginess of the sets. The big shock is the original trailer, which is included here for the first time. After watching that, I'm surprised anyone went to see the film – it's about as thrilling as an interview with Kevin Costner. (**DG**) A

ALSO OUT

Record for the fastest re-releases ever must go to Babylon 5 *Volumes 1 and 2, which we first reviewed only in issue one. They are joined by volume three, in which Lennier, Na'toth and Walter Koenig's Psi-Cop Bester all make their first appearances in a couple of pacy, character-driven episodes. All cost £10.99 each. The episodes comprising the rest of the series will be released in the coming months.*

Other (less fantastical) vids out on the Terror Vision label include two Vincent Price flicks, House of Wax *and* Theatre of Blood *(both with collectors' card) plus* The Hitchcock *and* Friday the 13th.

TEKWAR

Distributor: **CIC**
Starring: **Greg Evigan, Eugene Clark, William Shatner**
Release: **Out now**
Price: **£10.99 each**
Running times: **85-87 mins**
Text: **Dave Golder**

Tekwar Director: **William Shatner** (12) D+

Teklords Director: **George Bloomfield** (12) C-

Teklab Director: **Timothy Bond** (12) D

Tekjustice Director: **Gerard Ciccoritti** (PG) C+

When William Shatner's performance is about the best recommendation for watching something, you know you're onto a loser. But then, ol' Shatty did virtually create the role he plays in *Tekwar* himself. I say virtually, because although these *Tek* TV movies are based on the series of books credited to him, the actual writing of said books was allegedly done by someone else; he simply provided the "inspiration" for them.

It's the year 2044, and the most powerful drug in the world is Tek – a chip which, when inserted into a headset, enables the user to enter a euphoric cybertrip. Tek is controlled by the Teklords, an international criminal cartel. Jake Cardigan (Evigan), an ex-cop who apparently went bad, is awoken from a cryogenic sentence years early thanks to the intervention of the mysterious Bascom (Shatner), head of the Cosmos Detective Agency. He believes he was set up by the Teklords, but, because he was so high on Tek at the time of his arrest, he can't remember. Jobless, desperate to clear his name and reunite with his family, Cardigan agrees to work for the CDA, tracking down Tek criminals. In return, Bascom will help him uncover the truth about his alleged crime.

The Shat holds in his stomach.

"Tekwar" pretty much sets the standard for the rest of the movies – a lumpy, uneven, incoherent plot which refuses to either explain or follow up any of the concepts it dabbles in, populated by dreary characters and bogged down with cloying family scenes. There are some atmospheric cyberpunky moments, a couple of half-decent effects and a few lively action sequences, but it all looks cheap and suffers from some uninspired acting.

The follow-up, "Teklords," is more of the same. The convoluted plot this time has Cardigan trying to track down the source of a computer virus that can infect humans. Quite how is never made clear, because nothing is ever fully explained – the idea seems to be to get as many SF

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

IT'S THE USUAL MIXED BAG WITH THIS MONTH'S NEW MANGA ANIME RELEASES...

***Legend of the Four Kings* draws to its rather tedious conclusion, with magic, drama and flying Chinese dragons.**

Space Adventure Cobra (PG) **(95 mins) £13.99** B

Project A-Ko 2: Plot Of The Daitokuji Financial Group (12) **(45 mins) £9.99** B+

Angel Cop 3 (18) **(29 mins) £5.99** C+

New Dominion Tank Police Act 8 (PG) **(26 mins) £5.99** C

Orguss 02: Volume 2 (12) **(60 mins) £11.99** B

The Legend of the 4 Kings: Chapters 11 & 12 (12) **(92 mins) £11.99** D

Distributor: **Manga Entertainment Ltd**
Text: **Wil Overton**

Anime fans in the UK are having a pretty good time of it at the moment. After all, you could buy all of Manga Video's six (count 'em) July releases for less than it'd cost a Japanese otaku to snap up a single 26-minute instalment of *New Dominion Tank Police*. The question remains, of course, would you want to?

After the fanfare of *Space Adventure Cobra's* première at the recent nationwide Manga Festival, the subsequent video release reveals itself to be a somewhat '70s-style sci-fi mixture of *Our Man Flint* and *Barbarella*. Buichi Terasawa's wise-cracking, sideburn-sporting space pirate lets his libido dictate the action as he lusts after bounty hunter Jane Flower, and finds himself and his S&M android sidekick fighting to stay one step ahead of main baddie, Lord Necron, and his Galactic Guild. All good tongue-in-cheek fun, with stylish direction from the man who brought you the hitman without a smile, *Golgo 13*. Good animation too.

Meanwhile, over in Graviton City, school's out for Summer. There's a girl with Clark Kent (Superman) and Diana Prince (Wonder Woman) as parents, another who's really an alien princess who can't make sushi, a third who designs skyscraper-sized robots in her spare time, and a giant spaceship impaled on a tower in the city centre – *Project A-Ko* is back. The original film was one of Manga Video's earliest releases, full of in-jokes and parodies on other anime genres that only die-hard fans would understand. This follow-up (the first of five) continues in the same vein, focusing on the strangely innocent relationship between A-Ko (Athletic), C-Ko (Cute) and the insanely jealous B-Ko (Brainy), all mixed up in a plot to steal technological secrets from a crippled alien spaceship (which itself has been turned into a leisure complex). Don't try to fathom it out – instead, just sit back and enjoy the madness of it all. A nice bonus is that the original trailers and teasers (even a pop promo) are included too.

The rest of Manga's July line-up consist of continuations of already established series. *Angel Cop*, now in its third instalment, is very much standard Manga Video fare. What seemed to start out as a gritty action/thriller is at last beginning to show more fantastical elements as Angel is finally given the opportunity to have the very operation that's transformed her partner Raiden into a super-powered cyborg. Elsewhere we find Psychic Hunters, government conspiracies, and a particularly nasty scene where a guy is tortured with a gangrene-infected knife. Bike chases and mass destruction are the order of the day, with the usual profanities to hike up the certificate. Nice character designs and decent animation make this the sort of anime that will undoubtedly go down well with Manga's core audience.

There's no denying that *Dominion Tank Police* has a lot of fans, but then guns and girls never seem to find it hard to gain an appreciative audience. While it's not the most taxing half-hour's watching you're likely to get, it's low price is a definite plus. This time we find the Puma twins have made off with police officer Leona's pride and joy – her tank Bonaparte. It seems someone has planted a CD inside the tank, packed with information wanted by a mysterious gang with corporate connections. Of course, Leona goes nuts when she discovers Bonaparte is gone, and sets off to find him. The creator of the original manga, Masumune Shirow, never has had much luck with anime adaptations of his work (see the recent *Appleseed* for evidence of that), and *Dominion* continues the trend. Maybe you just can't work miracles in 26 minutes.

The month's best-named release – *Super Dimensional Century Orguss 02* – is a tale of war and robots, and average but nicely handled anime fare. Concentrating on characters rather than battling robots, it stars a young soldier, Lean, who finds himself caught up in a conflict he doesn't understand. The

Craig Evigan tries to forget he was in *My Two Dads.*

buzzwords into the script as possible and hope the audience doesn't notice.

But if the series has little idea about cyberspace, it has *no* idea about the British monarchy. According to "Teklab," the King of England must possess Excalibur to back up his claim to the throne. So when Excalibur gets nicked, Cardigan travels to the kind of London that only ever existed in *Mary Poppins* in search of the sword. Chirpy cabbies, "Shut yer gob" dialogue, double-decker buses – they're all embarrassingly here. And don't ask how Tek comes into all this...

It's quite a relief, then, to find "Tekjustice" bearing at least a semblance to decent drama. It's a courtroom story in which Cardigan is accused of murdering his ex-wife's new husband. While it still never wastes an opportunity to be silly (Cardigan's lawyer is a teenage prodigy) at least the plot is interesting and throws in a few twists.

On the production side, *Tekwar* is competent rather than impressive, with workmanlike direction, overfamiliar effects and soap opera sets failing to create a convincing future world. It's often left to the sound effects to remind you that you're not watching a cop series like *MacGyver*.

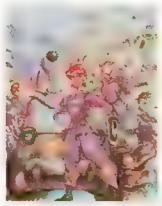
No wonder whoever wrote the books doesn't mind them being credited to Shatner...

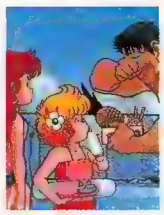
© Rian Hughes

The month in VIDEO

SF/FANTASY VIDEOS ON SELL-THROUGH AND RENTAL, CHARTS, PLUS NEWS OF UPCOMING RELEASES ON YE OLDE VHS...

Manga's staple diet of sci-fi adventure and monsters gets some light relief this month as, amidst the Tank Police, space pirates and future cops, *Project A-Ko 2* gives us ice cream.





mecha comes in the form of the Decimators – massive, garishly coloured battle robots which have been buried for centuries. Of course, the balance of power shifts to whoever controls the Decimators, and when Lean rescues a mysterious girl (why are they always mysterious?) who seems to have a connection to the mechas he finds himself at the centre of some unwanted attention. Be warned – this isn't an all-out action series, but clearly shows that you don't need wall-to-wall battles to create an interesting robot anime. Recommended.

Last and definitely least is the last episode in the never-ending tale of *The Legend of the Four Kings*. The four Ryudo brothers, descendants of an ancient race who have the usual fantastic powers, have to face a huge blue dragon that's after the US president. You know exactly what's going to happen here, and 90 minutes later there are no surprises.

Doctor Who Mark of the Rani

BBC Video

Cert: **U**
Director: **Sarah Hellings**
Starring: **Colin Baker, Nicola Bryant, Kate O'Mara**
Release date: **Out now**
Price: **£11.99**
Running time: **89 mins**
Text: **Neil MacIntosh**

I have to be honest here – right from the start Colin Baker never really clicked as the Doctor for me. He somehow seemed, um, too brightly dressed, I suppose. That said, presented here as it was originally transmitted, in two 45-minute episodes, "The Mark of the Rani" begins encouragingly enough.

The TARDIS is manoeuvred off-course and materialises in 18th century rural England. The industrial revolution is in full swing, and Luddite riots and machine-bashing are rife. The Doctor, however, appears to be not the only alien visitor... In fact, the place is full of 'em.

Two exiled Timelords – the Rani, a brilliant neurochemist, and the Master, the Doctor's sinister arch-foe – are at large (no mean feat for the Master, who spent most of his previous story being just two inches tall). The Rani, paying one of her regular visits to Earth, is extracting a chemical from the human brain to fuel her sinister schemes. The Master, meanwhile, has a megalomaniac plan of his own, involving the perversion of Earth's history and, of course, the destruction of the ever-irritating (and in this incarnation he has a point) Doctor. All entertaining enough, if a little unoriginal.

Unfortunately, halfway in, the plot peters out. What you're left with is much to-ing and fro-ing for little reason, hefty chunks of Timelords bickering, some cod-philosophy and a rather unnecessary moving tree.

Ultimately, "Mark of the Rani" relies too heavily on the interaction of the central characters. This is no bad thing in itself, as the Rani, the Master and the Doctor play off each other with bristling annoyance. Unfortunately, the overall feel is akin to a made-for-schools historical costume drama, and despite passable acting, competent directing and some nice touches here and there, the lack of any real plot and the abundance of loose ends make for irritatingly unsatisfying viewing.

D

Doctor Who Time and the Rani

BBC Video

Cert: **PG**
Starring: **Sylvester McCoy, Bonnie (Urgh) Langford, Kate O'Mara**
Director: **Andrew Morgan**
Release: **Out now**
Price: **£11.99**
Running time: **98 mins**
Text: **Neil MacIntosh**

The first to feature Sylvester McCoy as the Doctor, this four-part adventure displays many of the hallmarks – and pitfalls – which have helped make the *Who* saga so enduring.

The TARDIS is hijacked by the Rani and materialises on the planet Lakertya, where, with the help of the Tetraps, four-eyed, bat-like (and unscary) monsters, the Doctor's old enemy has subjugated the Lakertyan people.

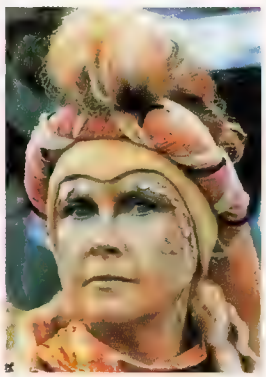
The Rani tricks the Doctor into assisting them in her plans – to use the great intellectuals from throughout time and space to convert Lakertya into a massive time-manipulator, so she can control creation.

Okay, the plot is nonsense, but in terms of pace, this one definitely hits a satisfactory note. The science might not make sense, and the story has its cheesy moments, but it still cracks along at a fair old rate.

Sylvester McCoy hams up the eccentricity, but manages to suggest an air of sinister mystery and bright intelligence, while Kate O'Mara is great as the Rani, here acting as an exasperated foil for the bumbling Doctor. Bonnie Langford, however, is miscast as Mel. Unsure whether to play the screamer or the practical, level-headed assistant, she only succeeds in being irritating.

Well-paced, with some occasionally impressive sfx, this is sci-fi farce overflowing with pantomime action, mistaken identity, mixed metaphors, daft monsters and scientific mumbo-jumbo. An enjoyable romp.

B



"Time and the Rani" – it's not as bad as you might remember.

The month in VIDEO

Death Machine

Entertainment in Video

Cert: **18**
Director: **Stephen Norrington**
Starring: **Ely Pouget, Brad Dourif**
Release: **Out now (rental)**
Running time : **111 minutes**
Text: **Tim Norris**

It's the year 2003, and chief executive Hayden Cale (Ely Pouget) is unaware that the company she owns is building nasty weapons. She is also unaware that her best designer (Brad Dourif) is a card-carrying loon with a bad haircut who's created an incredibly nasty metal death machine that looks like a cross between the Alien and a Terminator skeleton. Hmm, she doesn't know much, does she?

Of course, she soon finds out. One dark night (for reasons too poorly explored to trouble us now), the dribbly bloke with the hair lets the machine loose in the company's high-tech office block and it starts killing people – only our heroine and a couple of strangely attired terrorists (don't ask) can save us.

If you haven't seen it all before, you can't have seen the *Alien* movies, *RoboCop,* both *Terminators, Hardware,* even "The Hunted" (from the third season of *The Next Generation),* which all tackled pretty similar themes. With character names like John Carpenter, Sam Raimi, and Scott Ridley, it's obvious that writer/director Stephen Norrington is a fan of the genre – but is he ripping them off or just paying tribute?

Despite its stultifying lack of originality, *Death Machine* is rather enjoyable stuff. It looks quite stylish, and at least the script tries hard to be amusing. The effects are convincing, too, and it's a much better way of passing a couple of hours than an *EastEnders* omnibus.

Just one thing. If you do decide to watch the film, it'll save you hours of frustrated screaming at the TV if I tell you now that no, no-one ever does think of crippling the machine by cutting its hydraulic hoses...

C-

Last Gasp

Medusa

Cert: **18**
Director: **Scott McGinnis**
Starring: **Robert Patrick, Joanna Pacula, Mimi Craven**
Release: **16 August (rental)**
Running time: **89 mins**
Text: **Chris Hulme**

The construction of a hotel in a South American jungle runs into trouble when local tribesmen put the wind up the workforce with a bout of sacrificial murdering that would have most of us heading in the direction of the nearest TUC delegate. Building foreman Robert Patrick (the T-1000 in *Terminator 2),* however, decides that the only way out is to massacre the tribe.

He's warned not to get too close though – legend has it that upon their last gasp the tribesmen breath their evil spirit into anyone within range. Patrick, needless to say, gets a lungful and *Last Gasp* duly trundles into gear. The story then fast-forwards six years to somewhere in North America, where café owner Joanna Pacula makes a link between her missing husband and a company owned by Patrick.

Last Gasp shifts uneasily between crime thriller and lame horror, with dollops of voodoo-inspired gore used in lieu of genuine dramatic tension. There are a few spooky moments, but surely Patrick's appetite for McHuman burgers – inspired by the evil spirit – could have offered more potential for chills? The cast do what they can with the corny material, although Joanna Pacula, an actress apparently destined for great things in the '80s *(Gorky Park,* among them), turns in a half-dead sheep performance.

One minor titbit – Goldie, a dumb blonde seemingly transplanted directly from the set of *Knot's Landing,* is played by Mimi Craven, ex-wife of Wes "Elm Street" Craven.

The words "wide," and "berth" come to mind.

C-

***Last Gasp:* Voodoo-inspired gore in place of genuine drama.**

Wes Craven Presents Mindripper

Medusa

Cert: **18**
Director: **Joe Gayton**
Starring: **Lance Henriksen, John Deihl, Natasha Wagner, Claire Stansfield**
Release: **23 August (rental)**
Running time: **91 mins**
Text: **Dave Golder**

***Mindripper:* If he offers you a French kiss, get outta there...**

Talk about shameless marketing ploys... As producer/co-scripter Jonathan (son of Wes) Craven candidly admits, his dad acted in little more than an advisory capacity here (which probably means he glanced at the first draft over breakfast), but what the heck... When you're trying to sell a low budget shocker, anything goes...

Unfortunately, apart from Lance *(Aliens)* Henriksen and the fact it's been produced by the offspring of the man responsible for bringing us Freddie Kreuger, *Mindripper* has little to commend it.

Straight to video in the UK, it's a routinely directed gore-driven shocker with a script that's a bloody patchwork of skin grafts from movies like *Alien, Universal Soldier* and *Rabid.* Lance Henriksen (the hero for once) plays a scientist who quits a top secret project to develop the ultimate soldier. A few months later, however, he pops back into the desert-based, underground research centre – with his family, just before they go on holiday, oddly enough – and discovers most of the research team dead – and *sans* brains.

But before you can say, "If it's brains they're after, those teenage kids are safe," the entire Henriksen tribe are trapped in the research centre and suddenly fighting for their lives against a genetically engineered warrior with the kind of tongue Freud would have had a field-day explaining.

It's all familiar stuff, with few surprises. The direction, actors and effects make the most of the lame script and claustrophobic locations to give the film a sense of conviction rarely seen in low budget horror since the early days of Cronenberg and Carpenter, but in the end, you wonder why they ever bothered.

D+

Space Vets
The Shrunken Brain

BBC Home Video

Cert: **U**
Director: **Steven Andrew**
Starring: **Ann Bryson, Bernard Wright, Robin Kingsland, William Manning**
Writers: **Christopher Middleton/"Menace Of The Machines" by Christopher Middleton and Jurgen Wolff**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **70 mins**
Price: **£6.99**
Text: **Tim Norris**

How, I wondered as I watched this video for the first time, can a BBC sci-fi series from 1993 have passed me by? Why have I never heard of it? As the opening scene unfolds, the answer soon becomes painfully clear – it's a programme "for da kids."

Space Vets, rather than being, as I'd imagined, about grizzled ex-soldiers from some inter-planetary war, focuses on the adventures of a team of veterinary surgeons in space. The captain (William Mannering) is a young boy. The second officer (Two, played by Bernard Wright) is a git with blond dreads and a touch of the Arnold Rimmers about him. Mona (Ann "Creamy Philadelphia" Bryson) is the only one on the ship apart from the puppet dog (Dogsbody, voiced by Robin Kingsland) who really knows what's going on, and they all have adventures aplenty on what look like re-dressed *Red Dwarf* sets.

There are five 15-minute episodes on this tape, exploring such sci-fi standards as shrinking machines, android takeovers, time travel and a two-parter about being lost in some fibre-glass caves and then finding your way out again. It's all rather amusing, really, and certainly better-written than previous BBC kid fantasy efforts like *Rent-A-Ghost.* Just pretend you're buying it for your five year old cousin...

B+

***Space Vets: Red Dwarf* for kids or *Rent-A-Ghost* in space?**

Star Trek Voyager 1.2

CIC Video

Cert: **PG**
Directors: **Kim Friedman** ("Parallax"), **Les Landau** ("Time and Again")
Starring: **Kate Mulgrew, Robert Beltran, Robert Picardo**
Release: **Out now**
Price: **£11.99**
Running time: **90 mins**
Text: **Dave Golder**

Oh dear. It's a space paradox. And the Voyager gets stuck in it. And the crew spends the entire episode spouting bizarre metaphors at each other as if working out how to escape from a frozen-over pond will reveal the calculations required to escape from a mind-boggling space anomaly ("You smash through it," asserts Janeway scientifically).

"Parallax" is a poor follow-up to the superb pilot episode, with neither a decent plot or any interesting character development, just extreme amounts of jargon and loads of daft speeches. A lack of any guest stars or off-Voyager locations make it look like a cheapo filler episode of the least-inspired kind too.

Luckily, things pick up with "Time and Again," even though it relies on another *Trek* stand-by – the time paradox. An away team beams down to a planet whose entire population appears to have been destroyed

Some things never change. More wrinkly brows in *Star Trek: Voyager.*

as a result of some recent disaster. It's also created temporal anomalies, one of which engulfs Janeway and Paris, who are then transported back in time to the day *before* the disaster occurred.

Can they prevent the inevitable? Indeed, should they? Yes, it's Prime Directive arguments ahoy, as Janeway and Paris get involved with eco-terrorists and the rest of the crew try to find a way to pull their colleagues back into the present (this time – happily – without the use of an over-extended metaphor).

It's pacy, exciting stuff, based on a half-decent (if unoriginal) concept, marred mainly by some daft costumes, an annoying whining kid and uninspired sets. Good direction and subdued lighting add a cyber-punky atmosphere to the post-holocaust scenes on the planet, which contrast nicely with the classic *Star Trek* of the overlit, gaudy, underpopulated city sequences. Solid, if unimpressive, entertainment.

B-

Star Trek Voyager 1.3

CIC Video

Cert: **PG**
Directors: **Winrich Kolbe** ("Phage"), **David Livingstone** ("The Cloud")
Starring: **Kate Mulgrew, Robert Beltran, Robert Picardo**
Release: **7 August**
Price: **£11.99**
Running time: **90 mins**
Text: **Dave Golder**

Spock lost his brain in the original *Star Trek* series, Picard lost his heart in *The Next Generation*, Sisko went through a charisma by-pass operation in *Deep Space Nine*, and in Voyager it's Neelix who loses a vital organ – namely, his lungs.

"Phage" features a race of decaying body-part snatchers who dematerialise organs straight out of unwilling donors to replace their own. It looks like Neelix has taken his last gasp,

Neelix wishes he'd never carried that donor card in "Phage."

until the Voyager's Doctor manages to construct some holographic lungs – the price being tha t Neelix can't move if they're to work. So while the crew go in search of his real bronchials, Neelix studies the ceiling and spouts naive *Star Trek* rhetoric about the psychology of being paralysed. Fun in places, cringingly dull in others, "Phage" is the first *Voyager* episode to concentrate on Neelix, which isn't a good idea – he's just too irritating.

Much better is "The Cloud," although the plot is thin to the point of anorexic – Voyager flies into a nebula which turns out to be a living creature. Afraid they might have hurt it, Janeway puts the ship at risk to repair the damage. Utter nonsense, of course, but there are some great moments, and it's the first episode to be leavened by some healthy humour. Good effects too.

C

The Flash

Warner Home Video

Cert: **PG**
Director: **Robert Iscove**
Starring: **John Wesley Shipp, Amanda Pays**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **90 mins**
Price: **£6.99**
Text: **Dave Golder**

Let's face it – there's never been a TV superhero series in which the hero doesn't look completely ridiculous in costume. And *The Flash* is no different, despite going for the movie Batman look of padded pecs and the rest.

The actors playing the hoodlums try to look scared of this bloke who looks like he's wearing a lycra jumpsuit stretched over carefully positioned melon slices and tennis balls, but you know they'll collapse into fits of laughter when the director shouts cut.

Unlike the most successful superhero show of recent years – *The New Adventures of Superman* – it's not as if *The Flash* has much else going for it either. Shipp stars as police forensic scientist Barry Allen, who develops the power to move faster than the eye can see after being struck by lightning. The next thing you know, he's dressing up in a daft costume and avenging his brother's death at the hands of the local biker gang. It's just as formulaic as it sounds – God knows how it got commissioned for a series after this dismal shambles of a pilot – and weakened still further by a witless script and laughable special effects that leave the actors little to work with. Even the all-important action sequences – the life and soul of any half-decent superhero action romp – are hopeless and unconvincing.

Not so much a flash in the pan, as a damp squib that should go down it.

D+

Volume 1: **The Sorcerer, Make Me Not a Witch, Ordeal on Locust Street (80 mins)**

Volume 2: **The Last Round, The Devil's Laughter, The Open Window (80 mins)**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

Hosted and directed by John Newland, *One Step Beyond* was contemporary with – and somewhat similar to – Rod Serling's legendary *Twilight Zone* – and ran for three seasons from 1959. Unlike that series, however, it's been residing in the Never-Thought-We'd-See-It-Again File for years, until – huzzah! – Retro Video dug it up, dusted it down and re-released it on video.

One Step Beyond was based on "real" – or, at least, reported – paranormal occurrences, presented in the format of a half-hour anthology. Volume 1's highlight is "The Sorcerer," in which a WW 1 German officer commits murder by paranormal means, and stars a young Christopher Lee and Martin Benson (aka Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz from *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy!*). The best episode in Volume 2 is "The Last Round," which stars Charles Bronson as a boxer who has a premonition of death.

Acting and direction are generally very good, particularly considering the show's age. Admittedly, most of the stories don't quite resolve – like *The Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits*, *One Step Beyond* simply presents a spooky scenario and leaves you to make up your own mind. But while *One Step Beyond* isn't the most important series in the history of telefantasy, it's good to know it's now being made available again for those too young to have caught the first showing. All six episodes included are worth watching – although "Ordeal on Locust Street" features the worst Scottish accent in TV history...

Definitely better than the new *Outer Limits*, but not quite as good as the very best from the original *Twilight Zone*, this has to be one of the most commendable releases of obscure cult material to hit UK video shelves in recent years.

B

One Step Beyond

Retro Video

Director: **John Newland**
Starring: **Christopher Lee, Charles Bronson, Martin Benson**
Cert: **15**
Release: **Out now**
Price: **£9.99 each**

Coming soon

Blake's 7 **7 August**
13 volumes of Terry Nation's cult series (seasons one and two). Available for six months at a bargain price of £7.99. These will be withdrawn next January and never be released again. Ouch.

The Flintstones **7 August**
John Goodman stars as Fred, and some things have the word "rock" or "stone" in their names. Damn! We've just given away the entire plot and both jokes. Rick Moranis and Rosie O'Donnell plumb new depths of miscasting as the Rubbles in this turkeysaurus rex.

Star Trek: Generations (rental) **11 August**
Adios to the old crew and a big hello to those young *Next Gen* tikes in this, the seventh big-screen outing. Watch out for Kirk's death scene and your chance to crack the "Bridge on the Captain" joke!

Big **14 August**
Tom Hanks stars in one of several *Vice Versa*-esque movies which appeared in 1988. Here he plays a kid who magically grows up and discovers what it's like being an adult. Better then *Gump*.

Shrunken Heads (rental) **29 August**
Mega-bizarre tale of three cranially reduced, torso-deprived "superheroes" from Full Moon, the people who made *Dollman, Demonic Toys, Trancers* etc... Stars composer Danny Elfman's brother!

The Tomorrow People **11 Sept**
Surprisingly successful revamp of the old '70s series, with a cast consisting almost entirely of people called Christian...

SF Video Charts

The Next Frontier...

It's almost total TV domination for the video chart this month. Only Manga's ***Space Adventure Cobra*** prevents a complete TV takeover – it was a straight-to-video release in its native Japan. ***Voyager*** proves an immediate hit, although ***Deep Space Nine***, despite continued criticism that it's about as exciting as a Panorama report on the EEC butter mountain, is also doing well. Even more impressive, however, is that ***The X-Files*** and ***Red Dwarf 6: Byte 2*** are proving to have a much longer shelf life than science fiction videos normally have.

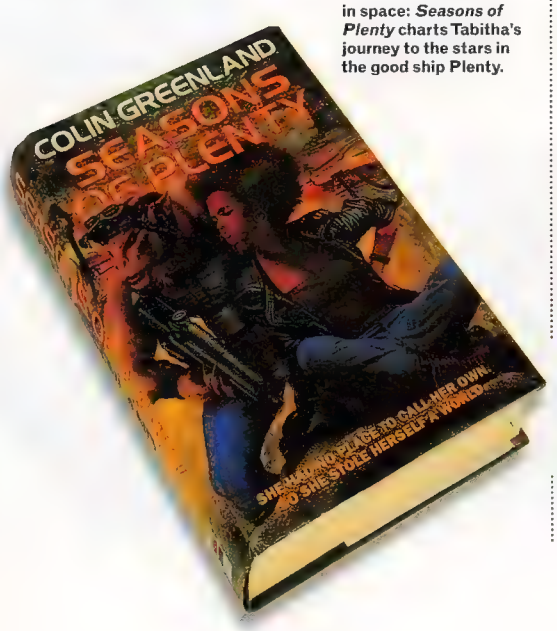
HMV SF Top 10

1 (New) **Star Trek: Voyager 1.2** CIC
2 (New) **Star Trek: Deep Space Nine 3.9** CIC
3 (New) **Star Trek: Voyager 1.1** CIC
4 (New) **Doctor Who: The Mark of the Rani** BBC Video
5 (New) **Doctor Who: Time and the Rani** BBC Video
6 (New) **Babylon 5: Volume 3** Warner Video
7 (New) **Space Adventure Cobra** Manga
8 (2) **The X-Files 4** Fox Video
9 (3) **The X-Files 3** Fox Video
10 (5) **Red Dwarf 6: Byte 2** BBC Video

"This is the sci-fi equivalent of a rave, and Greenland is the DJ, mixing and scratching images and ideas from old '50s novels, while adding his own '90s beat."

SEASONS OF PLENTY

The sequel to Take Back Plenty looks set to cement Colin Greenland's reputation as one of Britain's top science fiction authors



Alice in Wonderland **in space: *Seasons of Plenty* charts Tabitha's journey to the stars in the good ship Plenty.**

Author: **Colin Greenland**
Publisher: **HarperCollins hardback**
Price/page count: **£15.99, 403pp**
ISBN: **0-00-224208-7**

Text: **Simon Bisson**

Even though she's so stubborn and selfish you just want to knock some sense into her, Tabitha Jute is essentially a modern *Alice In Wonderland*, an eternal innocent, struggling to keep a grip on a crumbling wonderland, despite being a hard-bitten space captain on the surface. Okay, so she kept her head above water in Greenland's earlier opus, the Arthur C Clarke Award-winning *Take Back Plenty*, in which she stole the colossal starship Plenty out from under the noses of mankind's ruthless alien masters.

But it's a completely different story in Greenland's sequel. Tabitha, who, having defeated the Capellan overlords, is the hero of the solar system, takes the spaceship Plenty on mankind's first trip to the stars, a pleasant 18-month jaunt through hyperspace to Proxima Centauri.

The trouble is, she may not be quite as in control of the situation as she thinks. Plenty is an alien ship, you see – a place where nothing is what it seems. People start disappearing into its mysterious cavernous interior, no-one really knows where the ship is heading, and a mysterious woman has kidnapped Tabitha's best friend, the artificial intelligence that was her tramp freighter.

Tabitha can't cope anymore, and as she loses almost everything, Greenland traces the disintegration of Plenty's loose gathering of misfits and adventurers, moving from initial euphoria, through disillusionment, to final outright war.

This is space opera updated, full of complex themes and light touches brought together by the deft hand of a modern master. It's the science fiction equivalent of a rave, and Greenland is the DJ, mixing and scratching images and ideas from old '50s novels, while adding his own '90s beat.

Unfathomable aliens and comic humans share the limelight with cyberpunk posthuman constructs and holographic Cheshire cats, while a

VANITAS

SP Somtow certainly knows how to conjure up the seedier sides of his native Thai in *Vanitas* – the third tale in his respected vampire trilogy.

Author: **SP Somtow**
Publisher: **Gollancz hardback**
Price/page count: **£16.99, 352pp**
ISBN: **0-575-05655-X**

Text: **David Langford**

Nowadays, there are far too many vampire novels, and far too many over-extended trilogies. *Vanitas,* being volume three in a trilogy about – sigh – vampires, did not bode well – but somehow Somtow carries it off with style.

Timmy Valentine, having spent a couple of millennia as a young vampire, has regained humanity by passing the curse to his lookalike Angel Todd. This damages Timmy's career as a rock star – he doesn't sing so well now that he has to breathe – so he sets off on a weird farewell tour, leaving a trail of corpses behind him.

Besides the revolting Angel, the cast includes an artist whose paintings of horribly murdered Bangkok prostitutes are a wild US success; a blind Thai shaman who wears jewels in his eye-sockets; a mad young female who hopes she can become a vamp by biting off chaps' extremities and drinking their blood; a Native American visionary whose magical defence against evil consists of walking backwards...

In Valentine's memory-flashbacks, we also meet many real (and fictional) characters from history – Vlad the Drac himself, Shakespeare, Marlowe (whose death-wound, a stab in the eye, has been mysteriously moved to his stomach), Jack the Ripper and others. Perhaps the silliest scene of the lot has Valentine explaining the esoterica of vampirism to Bram Stoker, the interested audience featuring such famous names as Wilde, Bosie, Swinburne, Holmes and Watson. Oh dear.

What makes this weird mixture work, though, is Somtow's writing skill – the Thai scenes are particularly good, but then the author's from Thailand himself so that's to be expected. Then there are the lurid set-pieces of mayhem and transformation set on an opera stage, at the usual rock concert and – climactically – in an erupting volcano to keep you entertained too. Plus you get a full measure of orgiastic spurting, steaming blood and bad sex...

I wouldn't say I liked it, but it's impressive.

B-

INSOMNIA

Colin Greenland looks set to repeat the success of the Arthur C Clarke award-winning *Take Back Plenty* with this excellent sequel.

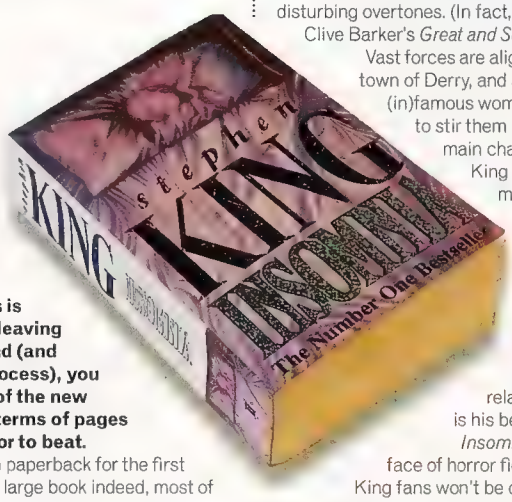
poet, a doctor and a judge discuss the meaning of life in a starship that might just be a space-travelling brain. In a climax full of fire and light, Plenty arrives at a destination, somewhere, although even here Tabitha's story doesn't quite reach a conclusion...

Seasons of Plenty is a powerful and extremely readable novel that will only add to Colin Greenland's reputation as one of Britain's best and most intelligent writers. Perfect if you're after science fiction that still gives you that old sense of wonder you thought had died out with E E "Doc" Smith.

A-

Author: **Stephen King**
Publisher: **Hodder & Stoughton paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 760pp**
ISBN: **0-450-60848-4**

Text: **Andy Butcher**



One of the main reasons the prolific Stephen King is so successful is the apparent VFM provided by his novels. When you're wandering around the bookstore, the sheer bulk of his paperbacks is always a persuasive force. Heaving his latest offering in one hand (and straining your wrist in the process), you cast your eyes over the rest of the new releases and realise that, in terms of pages per pound, he's a tough author to beat.

Insomnia, now available in paperback for the first time, is no exception – it's a jolly large book indeed, most of which is attributable to King's renowned, almost anally retentive (and often unwarranted), attention to detail. He's never been an author to sketch out a scene in a few sentences when a few paragraphs will do just as well...

However, that's where the similarities end, because, unlike his earlier stuff, *Insomnia* is actually less like a "horror" story and more like a piece of modern fantasy, but laced with disturbing overtones. (In fact, it's similar in many ways to Clive Barker's *Great and Secret Show.)*

Vast forces are aligned over the seemingly cosy town of Derry, and an upcoming speech by an (in)famous women's rights activist promises to stir them into action. Admittedly, the main character, Ralph, is an archetypal King character – an ordinary old man, whose mundane day-to-day existence is, of course, described in painstaking detail – but the story which unfolds around him is rather different. What's more, the ending's actually remarkably well done, a skill which King seems only to have acquired relatively recently. Certainly, this is his best yet.

Insomnia isn't going to change the face of horror fiction, but it's not a bad book. King fans won't be disappointed, but, more importantly, other readers – the kind who are often put off reading the usual King fare – may find their interest aroused by the slightly off-beat storyline. Just don't expect it to be fast-moving, that's all...

B+

© Rian Hughes

The month in BOOKS

THE LATEST NOVELS REVIEWED, PLUS WHAT'S IN STORE AND THE TOP TEN SELLING SCI-FI/FANTASY TITLES.

WORLDWAR: TILTING THE BALANCE

Author: **Harry Turtledove**
Publisher: **NEL paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 482pp**
ISBN: **0-340-64899-6**
Text: **David Langford**

Harry Turtledove's SF tetralogy is an alternative war story with an audacious, if slightly batty, premise. When the alien invasion fleet arrives to annexe Earth for colonisation, they find us already fighting: It's 1942... *In the Balance* was book one; and this is book two.

As in very traditional SF, the Lizard invaders underestimated human progress and expected knights in armour. Their '90s-style weaponry is still vastly superior, true enough, but there are loopholes – paralysing communications with nuclear electromagnetic pulses is no help against old-fashioned relays and valves, for instance.

Turtledove tells a big story on many fronts, with obvious (and plenty of not so obvious) ironies: The oppressed Warsaw ghetto supporting the invaders because anything must be better than the terror of the Nazis; Berlin and Washington nuked in an alien show of force; uneasy diplomacy as Allies and Axis find themselves in the same boat; heavy territorial losses in the USA; British radar development thrown completely askew by captured Lizard equipment with incomprehensible integrated circuits; the discovery that the invaders have an addictive craving for ginger...

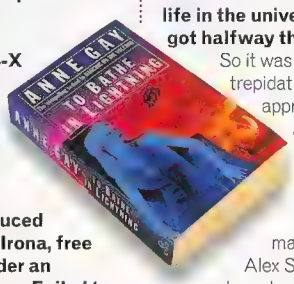
Tilting the Balance continues all the earlier storylines (some come to shattering ends too), but at its heart are reflections on the Manhattan Project. One lucky strike on an alien munitions ship has scattered weapons-grade plutonium all over the landscape: Who on Earth will first produce the Bomb, and where will it go off?

So what's next, you may ask. The stunned alien Fleetlord answers: "I don't know." Nor will we until book three, *Upsetting the Balance*. Not great literature, but a rousing, satisfying blockbuster.

B

TO BATHE IN LIGHTNING

Author: **Anne Gay**
Publisher: **Orbit paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 471pp**
ISBN: **1-85723-314-X**
Text: **Maureen Speller**



Anne Gay's previous novel, *Dancing on the Volcano*, introduced us to Twiss and Irona, free spirits living under an oppressive regime. Exiled to Harith, along with others who challenged Synod and the Matriarchy, and in turn banished by previous colonists to the desert, they survived by using their skill and ingenuity to bring about a peace which left them rulers of Harith.

In *To Bathe in Lightning*, some years have passed, and the peace between the Waves of colonists has become an uneasy truce. Competition for food and raw materials is fierce, and the First Wavers are reluctant to co-operate in Twiss and Irona's plans. Meanwhile, their own relationship is suffering because of the pressures of leadership.

And now someone, using Arms, the same cyborg mutants employed by the Matriarchy, is trying to undermine Harith's fragile stability, and bring about civil war. It soon falls to Irona to investigate, but only when she is abruptly transported to planet Earth does it become clear that she's still clearly in the power of the Matriarchy.

Gay spins a complex web of treachery and deceit, but while it may confuse Irona for much of the novel, the reader is left in little doubt about the final resolution, which is signalled at intervals throughout the story.

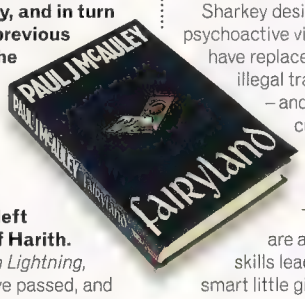
Nevertheless, there are moments of high drama when we might just wonder if we haven't after got it wrong after all, while lush and vivid writing – and enthusiastic, if sometimes bizarre, language – successfully distracts us from the woodenness of some of the characters. Overheated at times, but still absorbing and enjoyable.

B-

FAIRYLAND

Author: **Paul J McAuley**
Publisher: **Victor Gollancz paperback**
Price/page count: **£8.99, 336pp**
ISBN: **0-575-06071-9**
Text: **Chris Hulme**

A confession – I once lavished £14.99 on McAuley's third novel, *Eternal Light*, only to be so bored by its "cutting edge cosmological speculation" about the fate of intelligent life in the universe I barely got halfway through...



So it was with much trepidation that I approached *Fairyland*. Luckily, the story here gets off to a hip start as the main character, Alex Sharkey, struggles to survive in the perilous underworld of late 21st century London.

Sharkey designs psychoactive viruses – which have replaced drugs as the illegal trade of the future – and has his work cut out staying ahead of the corrupt coppers and Triad gangs who are after him. His skills lead him to a super-smart little girl called Milena, who coaxes him to help her quicken the intelligence of a genetically engineered doll. Their creation proves to have *big* implications for mankind.

McAuley's future is a place where nanotechnology and genetic engineering have forever altered the certainties about man's place in the world. Our basic freedoms are infringed by the invention of microscopic machines that enter the body on a breath, selectively removing memories or implanting beliefs. In the background, civil wars are fought out endlessly, the Net has more or less collapsed national boundaries, while the rich continue to get richer and the poor so poor they live in the Fourth World.

The author's vivid imagination provides *Fairyland's* main pleasures, weaving together spooky ideas (dogs with crocodile heads) and resonant backdrops (a ruined Disneyland Paris). It's a confident, unsettling book which hardcore SF fans should love.

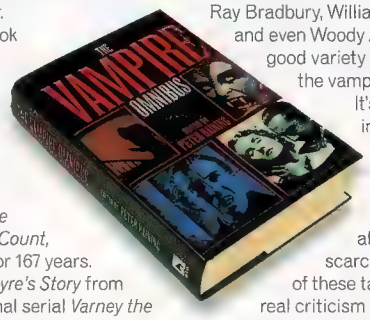
B

THE VAMPIRE OMNIBUS

Editor: **Peter Haining**
Publisher: **Orion hardback**
Price/page count: **£15.99, 496pp**
ISBN: **1-85797-694-0**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

The bloodsucker is such a ubiquitous figure in horror fiction – heck, we reviewed three vampire novels last ish alone – that picking stuff for an anthology should present no problems. But Haining, being the bibliographical demon he is, has put together much more than just an easy cash-in here.

There are 34 short stories/extracts included, dating from 1820 to 1991, most of which you won't have read before. Each is preceded by a couple of pages of information explaining its origins and significance, and providing biographical information about its author.



The book kicks off in fine form with an extract from Elizabeth Grey's *The Skeleton Count*, unseen for 167 years. *The Vampyre's Story* from the seminal serial *Varney the Vampyre* "by Thomas Peckett Prest" (1847) follows, here correctly credited to James Malcolm Rymer. Alexandre Dumas' *The Pale Lady* (1849) credits co-autnor Paul Bocage for the first time in an English translation. More rare pre- and post-Stoker tales follow in Section 1: The Prototypes.

Section 2: The Films kicks off with the first ever reprint of *The Bride of the Isles*, an adaptation of an 1820 play based on Polidori's *The Vampyre*. Admittedly, this selection is a trifle weaker than what's gone before, with extracts from widely known works such as *Interview with the Vampire* and *Return to Salem's Lot*, although it does include a transcript of an anonymous story read on the radio by Bela Lugosi in 1955. Worse, Haining does cheat occasionally; his text version of *Nosferatu* is actually from the novelisation of the 1979 remake and not from the original as he claims.

The final third of the book is entitled The Archetypes, and features more recent stories from the likes of Richard Matheson, Theodore Sturgeon, Ray Bradbury, William F Nolan and even Woody Allen; all a good variety of takes on the vampire mythos.

It's Haining's introductions which make this book, though, along with the scarcity of many of these tales. My only real criticism is that sometimes he doesn't specify exactly where a piece originated from – annoying when most of the bibliographical information is so commendable.

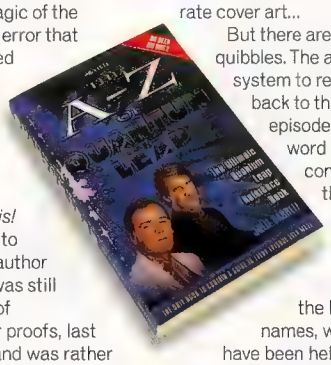
A-

The A-Z Quantum Leap

Author: **Julie Barrett**
Publisher: **Boxtree paperback**
Price/page count: **£6.99, 294pp**
ISBN: **0-7522-0628-1**
Text: **Hilary Broadribb**

This is exactly what the title says it is: A guide to the people, places, events and, erm, "things" featured in the much lauded *Quantum Leap* during its five-season run, from "ABC rap" to "Zoey." There's also a useful at-a-glance episode guide – complete with Leap dates – tacked on as an appendix, and an eight-page colour photograph section.

The problem is, although the entries are pretty accurate on the whole, the most cursory glance-through still reveals a number of mistakes. Defining a Vietnamese "hooch" as a bar (it's a thatched hut) could be put down to poor research, but it can only be the magic of the typographical error that has transmuted the book title *Women in Pain* into the far more promising *Women in Paris!*



It's only fair to mention that author Julie Barrett was still in the middle of correcting her proofs, last time I heard, and was rather startled to hear that her book was already being issued in the UK. This seems to be down to Boxtree's accelerated *Quantum Leap* schedule. We get the books early over here, but don't get them proof-read for some bizarre reason. We also occasionally get them in the wrong order, and with second-rate cover art...

But there are other quibbles. The author's system to refer entries back to their individual episode with one-word codes is very confusing, and the episode listing at the end doesn't give all of the Leapees' names, which would have been helpful. Cross-referencing would have been handy too. At the moment you have to know what you're looking for in order to find it. Worse, this book focuses entirely on the fictional elements of the series. It doesn't include actor credits, production details, list scriptwriters, etc., which would have made it a far more valuable reference work – and a great deal more interesting.

So exactly who is this book aimed at? It doesn't go into enough depth to be of much use to the serious *Quantum Leap* researcher, and I can't imagine it having an especially wide mass-market appeal. Sure, it's amusing enough to dip into, but hardly so compelling that you're likely to want to read it cover to cover. The photo section is uninspiring too – there's nothing we haven't seen before, although the "Carmen Miranda" shot of Sam is printed sideways, and one of the character names is given incorrectly...

Nitpicking aside, this A-Z stands as a useful aid to the finer details of the series.

B-

Gold Unicorn

Author: **Tanith Lee**
Publisher: **Orbit paperback**
Price/page count: **£4.99, 179pp**
ISBN: **1-85723-301-8**
Text: **David Langford**

From the tone of the Foreword, it's clear that this slim sequel to Tanith Lee's *Black Unicorn* is aimed squarely at "young readers."

To wit, Lee, a normally sensuous writer, downplays any hint of sex, and writes with unusual austerity and restraint. Death is deplorable, and hurts, but happens only to spear-carriers in the middle distance...

Heroine Tanaquil is a sorceress who can mend things. The sinister Empress Veriam, who turns out to be her half-sister Lizra, commissions her to fix a devilish, steam-powered war machine built in the shape of a gold unicorn.

The easily repaired unicorn is effectively nasty. Several cities fall to Lizra's army; others surrender. A few gentle ironies later, a wizard takes a hand and Tanaquil, Lizra and friends are sent to a "yucky" hell-world.

A pleasant read, with moments of fun, but very tame compared to Lee at full stretch...

C+

The Ferengi Rules of Acquisition

Author: **Quark, as told to Ira Steven Behr** (ho, ho, ho)
Publisher: **Pocket Books**
Price/page count: **£3.99, 86pp**
ISBN: **0-674-52936-6**
Text: **David Golder**

SFX rule of acquisition number one – don't buy a book that costs £4 when it takes you only fractionally less time to read the cover than it does to read what's inside. And especially when the cover is about as entertaining as things get.

What is the point of this book? The Ferengi Rules of Acquisition are the code by which the *Star Trek* universe's most avaricious race runs its business affairs. Some of them are funny. Some of them aren't. There are 285 in all and this book prints only 70.

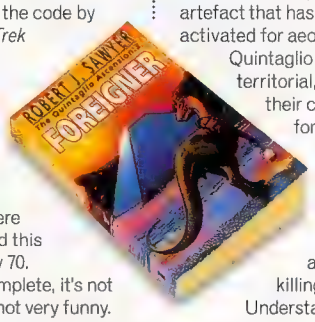
So it's not complete, it's not useful, and it's not very funny. What it is is thin, padded out with grainy pictures, and dear. Let's hope there's no profit in this book for its greedy instigators.

D

Foreigner: The Quintaglio Ascension Book 3

Author: **Robert J Sawyer**
Publisher: **New English Library paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 285pp**
ISBN: **0-340-61804-3**
Text: **Zy Nicholson**

You've got to be suspicious, haven't you? And I quote from – gulp – the 40-page glossary at the back of the book: "Quintaglios: An intelligent species of tyrannosaur, derived from... Nanotyrannus, meaning 'The People of Land.'"



The concluding part in this trilogy deals with the scientific and social revolutions set in motion by Sal-Afsan, the hero of the previous novels. Blinded for heresy after predicting the cosmological disaster awaiting the planet, he becomes the ironic recipient of a miracle. Meanwhile, his once-mate Novato explores an alien artefact that hasn't been activated for aeons...

Quintaglio are fiercely territorial, and, despite their capacity for rational behaviour, still prone to what's called *dagamant*, an instinctive killing frenzy. Understandably, the dinosociety is keen to respect personal space.

But Sawyer's Quintaglio are clearly human beings in scales – for every intriguing cultural invention there's a glib line of dialogue such as, "it's right on the fork of my tongue," or a jarring reference to "the wingfinger that laid the golden egg." The effect is infuriating.

Predictable stuff, and even those familiar with the earlier novels may be disappointed.

C-

Foreigner

Author: **CJ Cherryh**
Publisher: **Legend paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 378pp**
ISBN: **0-09-944401-1**
Text: **David Langford**

The vast future history which CJ Cherryh has developed over so many books is intimidatingly complex, so it's a relief to find this an independent tale (although sequels *are* in the offing, apparently).

Cherryh's love of complications, however, continues unabated. First, there's a dispensable episode explaining how human colonists become hopelessly stranded in this alien system; then a tense account of First Contact from the nonhuman viewpoint... And then, swiftly skipping over some centuries, the real story.

Humans lost the war for this world and are strictly confined to an island enclave, paying rent with scraps of advanced technology (although their secrets can't last forever). Apartheid rules: Only one human, our diplomat-interpreter hero Bren Cameron, lives among the alien "atevi." Following a mystery assassination attempt, he's spirited away to a remote castle, held *incommunicado* "for his own safety," and left straining to understand what's really going on.

The atevi are huge, fascinatingly enigmatic people with a vague samurai flavour – fond of exquisite architectural harmonies as much as blood-feuds, and with a concept of duty replacing that of honour. "Trust was a word you couldn't translate. But they had 14 words for betrayal."

Struggling for survival amid warring native factions and ambiguous alien hospitality, Bren starts piecing together a better understanding from contact with his own atevi bodyguards. His progress makes compelling, if sometimes elusive, reading. What he doesn't know is that the situation will soon be radically changed from the outside...

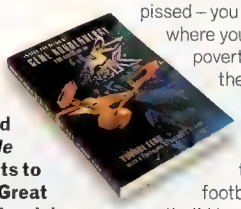
A solid and nicely constructed SF story of communication and non-communication.

B

Inside the Mind of Gene Roddenberry

Author: **Yvonne Fern**
Publisher: **HarperCollins paperback**
Price/page count: **£6.99, 228pp**
ISBN: **0-00-638429-3**
Text: **Karen Levell**

Based on the private conversations between the dying Gene Roddenberry and the author, *Inside the Mind of...* gets to the heart of the Great Bird's beliefs. His wish was that Yvonne Fern, a virtual stranger, should live with him and his wife in the months prior to his death to discover the private man behind the world-famous executive producer.



While it's full of references to *Star Trek*, the book's main focus is on his private dreamworld where the well-loved characters first came to life. Along the way, you get fascinating insights into his view of humanity and its future, metaphysics, quantum mechanics and, of course, the full range of emotions immortalised in *Star Trek* itself.

Sure, it's easy to dismiss many of these conversations as the type you have when you're pissed – you know, the ones where you solve world poverty, the nature of the universe and (if you're very lucky), the underlying problems in the English football squad – but that'd be rather unfair. Here such issues are discussed without the help of five pints of Stella Artois, with conviction and, one suspects, more knowledge than the guy ever lets on. *Inside the Mind...* is very naive in many ways, and yet – like the TV show itself – could persuades even the hardiest of cynics.

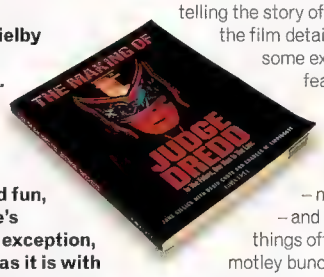
B+

Legends of the Law

THE ART OF JUDGE DREDD: THE MOVIE B
Author: **Various**
Publisher: **Boxtree**
Price/page count: **£12.99, 160pp**
ISBN: **0-7522-0666-4**

THE MAKING OF JUDGE DREDD B
Author: **Jane Killick, with David Chute and Charles M Lippincott**
Publisher: **Boxtree**
Price/page count: **£8.99, 192pp**
ISBN: **0-7522-0641-9**

Text: **Matt Bielby**



***The Art of...* type of movie books are almost always good fun, and Boxtree's *Dredd* is no exception, overloaded as it is with pre-production painting, sketches, diagrams and photographs from a variety of artists, including *2000AD* contributors Kevin Walker and Chris Halls.**

While much of the film looks spectacularly good – the cityscapes look just like the paintings, making some of them redundant – it's still interesting to see what alternative Judge uniforms and principal sets could have looked like. One by famed Italian designer Gianni Versace is particularly ludicrous – although perhaps not as bad as the transcript of the script that provides the bulk of the text in the book! This is perhaps the only weak point about *The Art of Judge Dredd* – description of the pictures is limited to short captions, so there's never enough explanation of what you're actually seeing.

The Making of Judge Dredd, on the other hand, is good value, telling the story of the making of the film detailed in SFX2 in some extra detail, featuring lots of great behind-the-scenes photographs – many in colour – and rounding things off with a motley bunch of conceptual storyboards. Strangely enough, almost all the possible endings storyboarded look a damn sight more interesting than the one they actually filmed. Trust Hollywood to opt for the dullest alternative...

Kaleidoscope Century

Author: **John Barnes**
Publisher: **Millennium hardback**
Price/page count: **£15.99, 252pp**
ISBN: **1-85798-269-X**
Text: **David Langford**

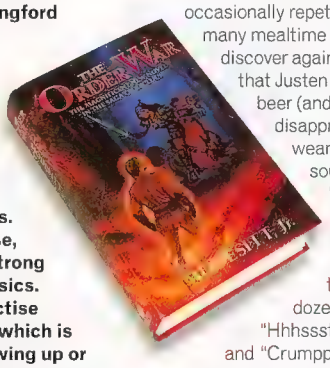
While John Barnes's SF disaster epic *Mother of Storms* was hugely impressive, this inventive new novel leaves a rather strange taste in the mouth, despite exploring some nifty ideas. Anti-hero Quare was born in 1968; now it's 2109 and he's suffering from the partial amnesia that hits him regularly as side-effect of a rejuvenation virus. The personal data terminal that holds his back-up memory offers out-of-order snapshots of what he did through the fraught 21st century...

And it's one hell of a century. History has already gone askew before 1995: Something very different happened when Boris Yeltsin climbed on that tank – President Bush dies of mutant AIDS (not "the old, easy-to-prevent kind"); and wars escalate and civilisation fragments, with smart weapons giving way to brilliant weapons, to computer viruses that can infect human brains – hence the Meme Wars and the quarantine of all Earth by the space colonies.

Quare's problem is that often he has several contradictory memories of the same event. The reader's problem is that, although the first-person narrative makes captivating reading, Quare is an amoral bastard: First, he's an American traitor spying for Russia, later a mercenary who kills countless innocents with minimal regret... Awaiting him in 2109 is a strange offer from the Organisation that long ago was the KGB. Quare can, in a way, live his life again. Bad though the century was, he can still make it *worse*... Very clever, but very black. B

The Order War

Author: **LE Modesitt Jr**
Publisher: **Orbit hardback**
Price/page count: **£15.99, 581pp**
ISBN: **1-85723-330-1**
Text: **David Langford**



This is the fourth in LE Modesitt's "Recluce" series of highly rational fantasy novels. In this universe, magic has a strong flavour of physics. Bad guys practise chaos magic, which is handy for blowing up or incinerating the opposition. Good guys, in contrast, are limited to what's called "order magic," which requires lots more skilled work and which at first seem merely defensive...

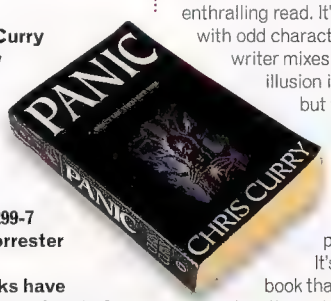
It's interesting here, though, to see this side's wizards devise clever loopholes, like iron arrowheads impregnated with order spells that cause chaos-tainted targets to explode rather messily.

Our hero Justen is an order-engineer of iron, steam and magic who, having fought hard and not quite won with conventional weaponry, goes on the run in a horrifying desert journey – and ends up understanding too much about the order/chaos arms race. Implacable conservation laws are at work – strengthening one side increases the power of the other. After nearly inventing nuclear explosives but thinking better of it, Justen goes on to manufacture some only slightly less devastating weaponry and – almost single-handedly – takes on the world.

Modesitt's story is engaging and exciting, although occasionally repetitive. In too many mealtime scenes, we discover again and again that Justen likes dark beer (and that others disapprove). I also wearied of the sound effect "Thrap" for every knock on a door, and the literally dozens of "Hhhssstt", "Sssttt" and "Crumppttt" noises in the climactic firefight with his adversaries. What carries the book is its set-pieces of engineering and warfare, plus a satisfying sense that the workings of magic have been painstakingly thought out. Enjoyable. B

Panic

Author: **Chris Curry**
Publisher: **New English Library paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 370pp**
ISBN: **0-340-62299-7**
Text: **Simon Forrester**



The Greenjacks have haunted the Piper family for years – they dance in the dark at the foot of the oak tree which grows in the garden at the Piper's ancestral abode, waiting to cheat a Piper from his or her body and take it over. To complicate matters, only one male Piper in every generation can see these mischievous apparitions.

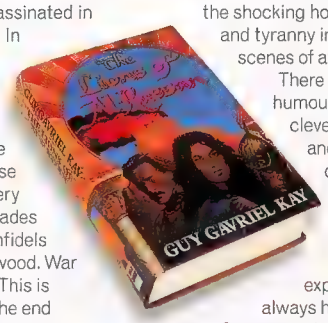
Currently, the lucky man is Ricky Piper, who at the start of *Panic* returns (complete with children) to the house where he spent his childhood, and witnessed his brother getting possessed, the murder of his parents and the oak tree getting frisky. Yup – it's patented Stephen King returning-to-traumatic-scenario-to-confront-childhood-fears time.

From hereon in, *Panic* alternates between flashbacks and mundane daily life scenes, spiced up with a goodly proportion of shocks, as all the while Ricky slowly turns fruit loop. Add a full chorus of transvestites, sex-crazed seniles and stuffed poodles, and you know you're not going to have a dull time.

It may rate low on the originality stakes, but the sheer diversity of *Panic* makes it an enthralling read. It's packed with odd characters and the writer mixes reality and illusion in a complex, but unfussy style. It's mainly let down by a few predictable plot twists. It's the kind of book that, despite its length, you'd read in two nights – then read again for the fun of it (and you'll still wince at the testicle scene). B

The Lions of Al-Rassan

Author: **Guy Gavriel Kay**
Publisher: **HarperCollins hardback**
Price/page count: **£15.99, 582pp**
ISBN: **0-00-22463-9**
Text: **David Langford**



You can rely on Guy Gavriel Kay to produce something rather special. This hefty volume isn't a conventional fantasy (although one character has clairvoyant flashes), nor is it volume one of a trilogy. It's a rich, unhistorical romance set in an alternative mediaeval Spain which has been rearranged to escape the straitjacket of history as we know it. And it's an utterly compulsive read.

The land of Al-Rassan is the southern half of the Spanish peninsula, long ago conquered by the desert tribes of alternative Africa, and now fallen into decay since the glory days of the Khalifs – the last of whom is assassinated in the prologue. In northern realms, kings pay lip service to the Jaddite religion, whose priests are very keen on crusades and nailing infidels to pieces of wood. War is inevitable. This is the story of the end of Al-Rassan.

Or rather, it's the story of a number of highly focused, credible and sympathetic characters whose shifting loyalties and passions interlock, and whose survival we come to care about – particularly Jehane, the female Kindath (i.e. Jewish) healer whose concern for a patient sets the whole intricate plot in motion. We care about these people because Kay does, too. His attention is always on individuals – and instead of lapsing into prolonged, generalised battle scenes so common in fantasy, he indicates the shocking horror of war and tyranny in short, sharp scenes of atrocity.

There is plenty of humour here too, and clever strategy, and effective depictions of love and friendship. Something not quite expected is always happening.

One near-miraculous escape from death hovers on the brink of wish-fulfilment, but there's no fudging of the book's final dilemma – in which two supreme warriors, Ser Rodrigo Belmonte from the north and Ammar ibn Khairan of Al-Rassan, whose epic friendship and exploits have already filled many pages, find themselves on opposite sides and compelled to fight to the death while wife and lover look on. Here Kay prolongs the suspense almost to screaming point – and has a last surprise up his sleeve. A

Read it.

ALSO RELEASED

CRUSHED, AS WE ARE, UNDER A SEA OF BOOKS, A ROUND-UP COLUMN IS THE ONLY POSSIBLE WAY FOR THE SFX REVIEW TEAM TO KEEP ON TOP OF THINGS...

Reviews by: Cavan Scott (CS), Zy Nicholson (ZN), David Langford (DL)

Kristine Kathryn Rusch's **Alien Influences** *(Millennium, paperback, 424pp, £4.99), opens with a gripping detective problem. Neglected kids on a colony world are dismembering each other in imitation of local alien rites. Who's guilty? The writing's fine, but the story sprawls, losing impetus by introducing far too many amazing psychic powers.* **(DL)**

In **Chorus Skating** *(Alan Dean Foster, Orbit, paperback, 344pp, £4.99) middle-aged adventurers Jon-Tom and Madge tackle a tone-deaf sorcerer who's intent on stealing the world's music. Bizarre as it sounds, this is a fun, entertaining romp. Just don't take it too seriously.* **(CS)**

A spate of grizzly murders in Christopher Pike's **The Cold One** *(Hodder & Stoughton, paperback, 393pp, £4.99) heralds the work of a demonic beauty intent on punishing others for her mother's accident. Unsympathetic characters.* **(CS)**

Arthur C Clarke's **A Fall of Moondust** *(Gollancz, paperback, 224pp, £5.99) appeared in 1961, when it was still imaginable that tourist ships (packed with Japanese, one assumes) might glide across the lunar landscape. Hence this ingenious disaster/rescue novel – basically an early, dusty version of* The Poseidon Adventure. *Dated but suspenseful.* **(DL)**

After trainspotters, what next? Bruce Sterling offers storm groupies in **Heavy Weather** *(Millennium, paperback, 280pp, £5.99). Americans already chase storms for research or fun (note the currently in production flick* Twister...*) – Sterling adds 21st-century eco-doom, VR frills and the Ultimate Tornado. Fine descriptions, but what an anticlimax!* **(DL)**

Artificial Intelligence has become so sophisticated, cities achieve a form of sentience in **Hotwire** *(Simon Ings, HarperCollins, paperback, 344pp, £4.99). Meanwhile, a hired assassin, Ajay, searches for the key to a higher plane of existence. Ings successfully, if pretentiously, creates a complex dystopia while offering a spark of hope for humanity.* **(CS)**

In **The Magic Engineer** *(Orbit, paperback, 759pp, £5.99), LE Modesitt tells the interminable story of the chap who launched his fantasy world's Industrial Revolution, with iron ships driven by steam but armoured with magic. The sequel,* The Order War, *is reviewed on the facing page.* **(DL)**

Starting out like 1984 *as written by James Joyce,* **Memories of the Irish Israeli War** *(Phil O'Brien, New Futurist Books, paperback, 263pp, £4.99) calms down eventually, but remains a victim of its own pretensions. Bizarre, hard-going and like something you study in A-level English, this "love satire for the post Gulf War era" has its moments, mainly thanks to some black humour, but it's one for literary fans only.*

Other Lands *(Jonathan Wylie, Orbit, hardback, 360pp, £16.99) begins with Zoe March's husband in a deep coma. She seeks comfort through hypnotherapy, only to find herself joined up with another life in a strange world, and her husband's life hanging in the balance. A highly original and absorbing thriller.* **(CS)**

World-weary copper Jack Dancer is on the trail of a serial killer who is, quite literally, a tool of the devil. Jim Ballantyne's **The Torturor** *(Gollancz, 240pp, hardback, £4.99) is a cauldron full of fire, brimstone, psychotic violence and sulphurous demons in South London. Deliberately concocted to shock, it merely manages to produce a nasty eggy smell.* **(ZN)**

Upland Outlaws *(Dave Duncan, Raven Books, paperback, 299pp, £4.99) is a plodding fantasy in which deposed ruler Shandie leads his band of outlaws against a power-mad dwarf who now controls the throne. A yawn-inducing yarn that fails to grab the imagination.* **(CS)**

In the war-torn 41st century of Warhammer 40,000: **Chaos Child** *(Ian Watson, Boxtree, hardback, 259pp, £15.99) Jaq Draco quests for the secrets of time to end an ancient battle between Order and Chaos. While well-written, this feudal saga could be confusing if you haven't read the previous three novels.* **(CS)**

RIDING THE UNICORN

Author: **Paul Kearney**
Publisher: **VGSF paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 254pp**
ISBN: **0-575-05919-2**
Text: **David Langford**

A straightforward, tough little fantasy novel that takes a familiar theme – ordinary chap from our world is whisked into another place where magic works to Serve a Higher Purpose – and seasons it with a large dose of black, common sense. Being wafted to a simpler world that offers high adventure, good beer and the attentions of a gorgeous woman may be a gift horse that needs a very careful look in the mouth...

The protagonist John Willoby is not the usual handsome athlete who just happens to be a top-notch fencer with degrees in three classical languages. He's an ageing, overweight prison warder whose marriage has gone sour and who can only interpret the approaches of the other world as symptoms of madness. Soon he finds himself explaining his voices and visions to a condescending psychiatrist, with the looming prospect of either jobless despair or a long haul in a mental home.

Meanwhile, the fantasy realm is a brutal place, where Willoby is only wanted for one specific task – to commit regicide; an act which will immediately get him killed. Because Willoby's a rootless outsider, the crime can't be pinned on any one known clan, thus enabling the usurper to step into the throne with clean hands.

And the hero has half-convinced himself this is all a dream from which terminal violence can only wake him up...

There's nothing new here, but Kearney tells his story well enough (although there's no unicorn!) and ends it on just the right note.

THE SHIP WHO WON

Author: **Anne McCaffrey & Jody Lynn Nye**
Publisher: **Orbit hardback**
Price/page count: **£15.99, 333pp**
ISBN: **1-85723-315-8**
Text: **David Langford**

It's a mild shock to discover that Anne McCaffrey's *The Ship Who Sang* dates back to the '60s. Those energetic stories of Helva the musical cyborg spaceship were something new back then – SF sentimentality that worked, with not much subtlety, but copious amounts of throbbing emotional melodrama.

This latest book in the series was partly written by Jody Lynn Nye, who's certainly captured the '90s McCaffrey tone – the slightly stale flavour of one sequel too many, sadly. It's colourful enough, though, with some of the original's distinctive scattiness. A typical foul space-oath goes, "Ramjamming fardling flatulating dagnabbing planet!"

Cyborg ship-brain Carialle and her "brawn" partner Keff are on a mission to seek new worlds, to boldly go, etc. etc. Soon after First Contact, a sense of haunting familiarity emerges. The Enterprise – sorry, Carialle – is in the grip of an unknown force! Chief Officer Keff has been captured by native slavemaster wizards with amazing powers that science can't explain! But one wizard is a nice girl who fancies Keff, and escapes with him in a prolonged chase scene!

Meanwhile, Carialle works out how to block the wizards' not-really-magical-at-all abilities....

If you can put up with the nagging resemblance to all too many previous science fiction/fantasy novels, this adventure has a certain ramshackle charm. I forgot to mention that the planetary mess is set to rights by convincing everyone to live in harmony with each other, their environment, and some additional late-breaking aliens.

If only this sort of thing worked on present-day Earth we could all relax and a have a good time.

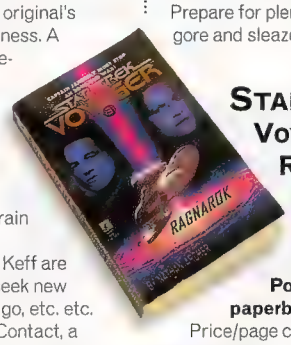
THE HALLOWS

Author: **Michael Scott**
Publisher: **Creed paperback**
Price/page count: **£4.99, 360pp**
ISBN: **0-45-118379-7**
Text: **Simon Forrester**

Way back in the mists of an old woman's life, a tramp gives a group of children one mystical item each, with the strict instructions that these "hallows" never, ever be brought together.

Time, inevitably, rolls on, and when we rejoin the story in '90s Britain, Judith, one of the kids, is now a large sword-wielding septuagenarian – and she's got problems. Slowly, one by one, the children are being tracked down and killed.

A decent example of textbook suspense-horror writing in the style of James Herbert. Prepare for plenty of gore and sleaze...



STAR TREK: VOYAGER: RAGNAROK

Author: **Nathan Archer**
Publisher: **Pocket Books paperback**
Price/page count: **£4.50, 277pp**
ISBN: **0-671-52044-X**
Text: **Karen Levell**

This is a classic example of first series blues. Like the TV shows, early series *Star Trek* novels always feel empty – the characters tend to be drawn with thick, black marker pens, and the interaction of the command crew is often woolly and confused. *Ragnarok* has all the usual symptoms: Sluggish pacing, repetitive description and dialogue, last-minute action and poor character development.

It's a pity really, because the basic plot – all about an ancient interstellar battle, fought between two feuding races – has potential. We barely meet the aliens, the author instead concentrating on Janeway's struggle between her desire to intervene and the edicts of the Prime Directive.

Archer's excellent handling of the battle sequences almost make ploughing through Janeway's internal turmoils worthwhile. But not quite.

Coming soon

Black Lightning
John Saul, Bantam **10 August**
When a Seattle serial killer is executed, the murders continue regardless. Is it just some copy-cat psycho or has John Saul seen *Shocker* one time too many?

Apollo 13
Jim Lovell & Jerry Kluger
Coronet **17 August**
The novel of the movie of the true life story. I wonder if any of the real astronauts are receiving royalties?

Brothers
Ben Bova, NEL **17 August**
The ex-*OMNI* editor who's the real scientists' SF author returns with his novel about a scientist whose experiments into regenerating human organs within the patient threaten the very fabric of society.

Millennium
WA Harbinson, NEL **17 August**
The Project Saucer series comes to an end as Earth faces the most horrendous conspiracy in human history (well, the most horrendous one not involving Jeremy Beadle).

The Knights of the Black Earth
Margaret Weis
Gollancz **24 August**
In what can be best described as an up-market version of *Blake's 7*, anti-hero Xris seeks revenge on a fellow mercenary who betrays him.

Sailing Bright Eternity
Gregory Benford
Gollancz **24 August**
August is obviously the month for wrapping up sagas as *Galactic Centre Cycle* also reaches its conclusion. Three men from three generations of the same family prepare for one final battle against the galaxy-destroying mechs.

The Crow: The Movie
Jeff Connor, Titan **August**
Stuffed full of colour pics, *The Crow: The Movie* details every facet of the film's production and contains some of the last interviews with Brandon Lee.

Best-selling SF Books

The Power of TV

Scully and Mulder are proving popular in just about every form of media going at the moment, and even though ***Whirlwind*** is, frankly, pretty poor, it's gone straight in at the top of the charts, surprisingly preventing Mr Banks' latest from nabbing pole position.

The Forbidden Planet SF Book Chart

1 **X-Files: Whirlwind** Charles Grant (HarperCollins)
2 **Feersum Endjinn** Iain M Banks (Orbit)
3 **Powerline** Anne McCaffrey and Elizabeth Ann Scarborough (Corgi)
4 **Babylon 5 Vol 3: Accusations** Lois Tilton (Boxtree)
5 **Star Wars: Assault at Selonia** Roger McBride Allen (Bantam)
6 **Magic Engineer** LE Modesitt Jnr (Orbit)
7 **Judge Dredd** Neil Barrett (Boxtree)
8 **Brother Termite** Ian Anthony (NEL)
9 **Necroville** Ian McDonald (Gollancz)
10 **World War: Tilting the Balance** Harry Turtledove (NEL)

MODEL Reviews

"Deep Space Nine is an exciting kit, with or without the lighting system, and turns into a 16-inch diameter representation of the Cardassian-built-but-Federation-controlled spacestation."

LET THERE BE LIGHT!

AMT/Ertl's glowing Deep Space Nine looks glorious. Er, if you remember to turn the lights off...

Manufacturer: **AMT/Ertl**
Price: **£45**
Contact: **Any good toy/model shop**

Text: **Mike Reccia**

Major kit-maker AMT/Ertl has added a neat new twist to selected larger models from its science fiction range – fibre-optic lighting! The latest subject for this special treatment is its Deep Space Nine station, a kit from the *Star Trek* spin-off series which went on sale in standard form about a year ago.

This beefed-up version of the Deep Space Nine spacestation is basically the standard kit, plus 2,000 inches of fibre-optic strand, a 6 volt power pack, a battery-operated palm-sized "micro-drill" with bit, 14 tiny light bulbs and four reflective, self-adhesive chrome strips. Batteries you have to provide yourself.

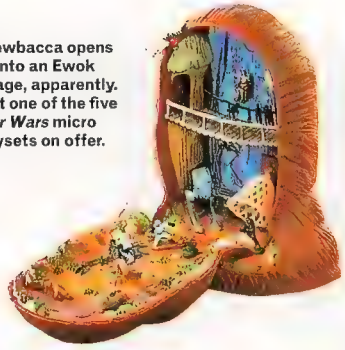
This pack of goodies enables you to light up the darkness of deep space by equipping your 150-piece station with over 1,000 pin-points of channelled fibre-optic light. Be warned though: It's a time-consuming process, and one that should only be tackled by the most patient of model-makers. Basically, you use the drill to pierce the plastic prior to feeding fibre-optic strands into the resulting "window" holes, and gluing them into place.

You then have to route bundles of strands through the interior of the kit to "reflector dishes." These connect to battery-powered light bulbs, which feed the optics. Additional bulbs are used to illuminate the ice-cream cone shaped reactor core at the bottom of the station's hub, plus the twin spotlights on each of the three docking pylons. Red and orange transparent parts are provided to house the lights in these areas.

You'll just have to take our word for it that this *DS9* station looks great in the dark...

Deep Space Nine is an exciting kit, with or without the lighting system, and turns into a 16-inch diameter representation of the Cardassian-built-but-Federation-controlled spacestation made famous by the series. Three tiny two-part Federation Runabout ships are included to sit on the launch pads (one of which is partially lowered), situated on the station's inner ring. Lighting adds scale in normal conditions, although the effect is best in total darkness. Besides patience, the only real downside I can see is that the bulbs are sealed in once the kit's been assembled...

If you like the effect you should also check out AMT/Ertl's *Star Trek: The Next Generation* Enterprise NCC 1701-D, which has been given similar treatment, and the Star Destroyer from *Star Wars,* which looks very neat. (By the way, all the above kits will continue to be available in standard form for those who prefer their lights hanging from the ceiling...)



Chewbacca opens up into an Ewok village, apparently. Just one of the five *Star Wars* micro playsets on offer.

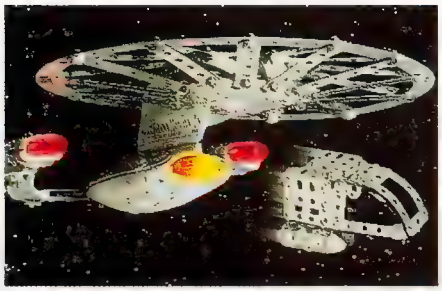
STAR WARS MICRO PLAYSETS

Manufacturer: **Micro Machines**
Price: **£14.99**
Contact: **Any good toy/model shop**

Text: **Mike Reccia**

Available now from larger toyshops are five transforming *Star Wars* action playsets, courtesy of Micro Machines. Contained within each of the character heads is a playscene, six tiny figures and a craft from one of the films.

Darth Vader transforms into an imperial outpost from *The Empire Strikes Back;* C3PO into the *Star Wars* cantina; R2D2 into Jabba the Hutt's palace; a stormtrooper into the Death Star, and Chewbacca into an Ewok village. Buy, store in mint condition, then retire off the proceeds in years to come.



METAL STARSHIPS

Manufacturer: **Peter Pan**
Prices: **£45.99**
Contact: **Any good toy/model shop**

Text: **Mike Reccia**

The *Star Trek* merchandise just keeps on coming – the latest being this *Next Generation* Enterprise and Shuttle construction set from Peter Pan toys. The Meccano-like steel construction kit costs £45.99, and contains 410 parts, three tools and a stand.

Two 1.5 volt batteries (not included) power the flashing lights and four different sound effects. The results don't look that much like the TV models, so I suspect purists won't be impressed, but they're unusual and attractive in their own right, and should become quite collectible.

The month in TOYS & MODELS

THE REST OF THE MONTH'S TOY AND MODEL RELEASES, PLUS NEW STUFF COMING UP. EDITED BY MIKE RECCIA, EDITOR OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY MODELS MAGAZINE.

Recent releases

GENERATION FIGURES

Manufacturer: **Bandai**
Price: **£5.99 each**
Contact: **Any good toy/model shop**
Text: **Mike Reccia**

Bandai's collection of eight action figures from *Star Trek: Generations* are a must buy for keen collectors. What makes these so special is the fact that the uniforms depicted never appeared in the film.

They're based on early production designs, abandoned by the movie only after tooling for the figures had already gone ahead. They're therefore a must for the collector, and sure to disappear from the shelves fast. Choose from Captains Kirk and Picard, and the evil Doctor Soran.

They didn't wear *that* in the film. (Er, yes, that's the point...)

COMMUNICATOR BADGES

Manufacturer: **Bandai**
Price: **£7.99**
Contact: **Any good toy/model shop**
Text: **Mike Reccia**

Also from Bandai is a movie communicator "badge," featuring the revised *Star Trek* logo worn by personnel in both *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager*.

The oversized communicator uses two replaceable watch batteries to produce the familiar chirping sound when pressed, plus flashing red lights for that authentic final touch. A can't-miss investment.

Coming soon

Batman Forever
Revell **16 August**
A medley of detailed models based on the characters and gadgets in the movie, including Val Kilmer Batman figure, and Batmobile, Batwing and Batboat craft.

Doctor Who
Comet Miniatures **July**
Limited edition (250 only, so place your orders *now)* Emperor Dalek with Davros figure. Each one comes with a certificate proving that you can do a forward roll on a green mat without hurting your head. (Not really...)

Ra
Horizon **July**
Limited edition solid model based on the tyrannous alien character from SFX's fave flick *Stargate*.

Watch out, mother! The Battle Warriors show you just how 'ard they are.

BATTLE WARRIORS

Manufacturer: **Bluebird Toys**
Price: **£5.99 each**
Contact: **Any good toy/model shop**
Text: **Mike Reccia**

Bluebird Toys has added to its range of *Mighty Max* collectibles with the release of these Battle Warrior action figures.

The four well-detailed warriors – Fang, Lava Beast, Hydra and Conqueror – are fully articulated, come with missiles and tiny companion figures, and open up to reveal an interior playscene. Primarily for younger collectors but should also appeal to *Dungeons & Dragons* modellers. Nice colours, nice concepts – and I had great fun playing with 'em.

Too good for kids!

FLYING SUB

Manufacturer: **Monogram**
Price: **£25**
Contact: **Comet Miniatures**
☎ **(0171) 228 3702**
Text: **Mike Reccia**

One of the most striking images from the wacky '60s TV series *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, aside from the Seaview herself, was the bright yellow "flying" sub...

This two-man sea-to-air craft was the subject of a 1/60th scale kit in the late '60s. The model, which featured a lift-off top and detailed interior, was originally created by model kit legends Aurora, but this limited edition re-issue has now been made available by Monogram, along with the original box art. A seated Admiral Nelson and Captain Crane are also included. Snap this one up if you love classic SF.

NEW MEDIA Reviews

"*Command & Conquer* runs in real time – so no hexes, no turns, no complicated action points and no sitting about..."

COMMAND & CONQUER

The perfect PC strategy game has just arrived

Format: **PC CD-ROM**
Price: **£44.99**
Publisher: **Virgin ☎ (0181) 960 2255**

Text: **Andy Butcher**

If you think all strategy games are a bit, well, dull, here's one that'll change your mind. *Command & Conquer* is set in the near future, after a mysterious meteor shower has deposited strange crystals with amazing properties all over the planet.

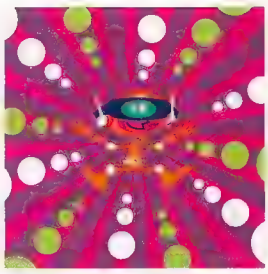
Unfortunately, a shadowy terrorist organisation called The Brotherhood Of Nod has worked out how to refine and harvest the new mineral before anyone else, thrown off its veil of secrecy, and openly invaded the areas with the richest deposits. Obviously, the "real" governments of the world aren't happy with this arrangement, and have created a special taskforce – the Global Defence Initiative – to combat the threat.

Command & Conquer casts you as a commanding officer in the service of either the GDI or the Brotherhood, charged with defeating the opposition in a series of critical areas around the globe. After being briefed on the situation, often accompanied by some stunning animated cut scenes which reveal the story so far, you're thrown into the mission itself. Here you see the battlefield from a slightly isometric viewpoint, and command your troops, vehicles and bases via an incredibly simple mouse-driven interface. Just click on a unit to select it, then on a destination – and that's all there is to it. The units then move automatically.

Selecting an enemy unit, on the other hand, makes your guys sidle up to within weapons range and open up. Even without orders, your trusty troops will defend themselves against attacking enemies, which is just as well because *Command & Conquer* runs in real time – no hexes, no turns, no complicated action points, and no sitting about thinking. Here, you've got to be alert and concentrate the whole time. The graphics are lovely, the sound just about the best ever in a computer game, and the gameplay fiendishly addictive. Add to that a multi-player mode and some incredibly cool vehicles and you've got one of the best games to hit the PC in an age. Unmissable.

A+

Just one of the many cut-scenes illustrating the unfolding storyline in *Command & Conquer*.



The month in NEW MEDIA

THE BEST IN SF AND FANTASY-RELATED GAMING COMING YOUR WAY...

FX FIGHTER

Format: **PC CD-ROM**
Price: **£44.99**
Publisher: **Philips Media**
☎ **(0171) 911 3094**
Text: **Andy Butcher**

For years now, the consoles have had the edge over the humble PC in terms of high quality beat 'em-ups.

But now *FX Fighter is here*, and it looks set to put paid to that trend once and for all. As with all games of this kind, the plot (something to do with a galactic overlord challenging the best fighters from around the universe) is irrelevant. What is important is gameplay, and *FX Fighter* plays like a dream. The graphics are fast, smooth and stunningly animated, the sound is superb, the characters imaginative and unusual, and the range of moves and combinations on offer simply staggering. What's more, the controls are fast, intuitive and responsive, giving you a real sense of being involved in the action, and the computer opponents take some beating. In all, nearly the perfect beat-'em-up.

"If you get the right one you get Radio 4." Nipple-tweaking at its very best in *FX Fighter*.

A

HI-OCTANE

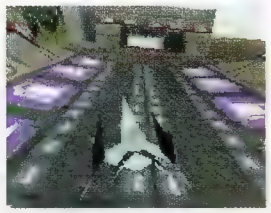
Format: **PC CD-ROM**
Price: **£44.99**
Publisher: **Bullfrog/ Electronic Arts**
☎ **(01753) 549442**
Text: **Andy Butcher**

Racing games are all very well, but when it comes down to it, most of them are pretty frustrating affairs. There's nothing quite as annoying as being stuck behind an awkward driver intent on blocking you, or overtaking another car only to have them slipstream you and come right on past at the next straight.

Luckily, such things aren't a problem in *Hi-Octane,* for the simple reason that your car is armed – and armed to the teeth. This is futuristic racing action at its best, with up to eight hover-vehicles screaming around tracks that actually change as you race, blasting each other with auto-cannons and rockets.

Not the deepest or most subtle of games, and you'll need a fast machine to get the best out of it, but great fun nonetheless.

B



Oh, all right, so *Hi-Octane's* just a racing game in the air. What do you want? Blood?

TERMINAL VELOCITY

Format: **PC CD-ROM**
Price: **£44.99**
Publisher: **US Gold**
☎ **(0121) 625 3388**
Text: **Andy Butcher**

If you ever wanted to fly the Millennium Falcon through an asteroid field, pilot a Snowspeeder across a barren snowscape, or scream through the innards of the Death Star 2, then *Terminal Velocity* is definitely your kind of game.

Predictably enough, you're humanity's last and only hope against a strange alien threat that has taken over the defence systems of all the colonised worlds and is turning them against Earth. To succeed, you must blast your way through nine worlds, each made up of three frantic levels, zooming through tunnels, screaming along canyons, blowing things to bits all over the place and generally having a great time.

Blindingly fast and playable 3D shoot-'em-ups just don't come much more blindingly fast or playable than this.

A

Shoot to kill! Your objective in *Terminal Velocity* is simple...

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The Ridley Scott future-city classic, with great performances, no voice-over, a nicely ambiguous plot and a trio of neat collector's cards. ☐

Forbidden Planet (Widescreen) U
A sci fi masterpiece, based on *The Tempest*, a massive influence on *Star Trek*, and introducing *that* robot. With original trailer, collector's cards, and utterly, utterly essential. ☐

Batman (Widescreen) 15
The first of the "modern" *Batman* films, featuring a powerhouse performance from Jack Nicholson, brilliant Anton Furst designs, and some cracking dialogue. With original trailer! ☐

Batman Returns (Widescreen) 15
The second *Batman* film, best remembered for Michelle Pfeiffer's glorious Catwoman, and some fairly dubious mechanical penguins. With original cinema trailer. ☐

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COMIC Reviews

"*From Hell* is clearly where Alan Moore is at now – he seems keen to tackle the same subjects as Booker-prize winning novelists."

THE TWO ALAN MOORES

From Hell
Publisher: **Mad Love/Kitchen Sink Press**
Writer: **Alan Moore**
Artist: **Eddie Campbell**
Issues: **1-7**
Price: **£3.10**

A

Spawn: Blood Feud
Publisher: **Image**
Writer: **Alan Moore**
Artist: **Tony Daniel/Kevin Conrad**
Issues **1**
Price: **£1.45**

B

The Greatest Living Comics Writer enters new territory

Text: **Matt Bielby**

Once upon a time, you could rely on Alan Moore for a number of things – strong female characters, nifty scene-changing devices, highly organised plots, and superheroes, albeit of a leftfield variety. Oh yes, and comics as events – the 12 issue mini-series *Watchmen* was, along with Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, the most important comic book of the '80s, and directly responsible for a) the graphic novel "boom," b) DC's Vertigo line, and c) the fact that I, and thousands like me, still put up with comics at all.

These days, though, *that* Alan Moore – the one who produced literate, exciting superhero epics like *Watchmen, Miracleman, V for Vendetta, Swamp Thing, Halo Jones et al* – has vanished. Instead, we have two replacements – the "serious" Alan Moore, who produces arguably the *only* genuine "graphic novels," and the "jobbing" Alan Moore, who writes simple, fast, action-packed superhero comics for Todd McFarlane. *From Hell*, an intensely researched, painfully accurate fantasy built around the known facts of the Jack the Ripper case – currently just over halfway through its run – is his most important serious work to date, while *Spawn: Blood Feud* is the latest throw-away effort, spearheading a whole batch of new stuff for Image.

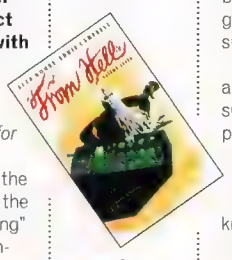
What's going on here seems pretty obvious – the Image stuff, clearly superior to most mainstream superhero work of the moment, but just as clearly bashed off in an afternoon as the sort of exercise that saw Elvis Costello write an album of songs for Wendy James, finances the serious comics. *From Hell* is clearly where the real Alan Moore is at now – bored of trying to make spandex-wearing do-gooders look realistic, and keen to tackle the same subjects as Booker-prize winning novelists.

And very successful it is too – gritty, black-and-white, deliberately not "well drawn" in the way superhero comics are "well drawn," and all in all probably closer to Art Spiegelman's *Maus* than any other well-known comics project. It's a straight and credible speculation on what could have happened in Whitechapel in 1888, based on the known facts. Occasional brief fantastical moments like when Moore's murderer, William Gull, appears to pass through rifts in time to the "even more horrific" modern age – just about push it into SFX territory too.

The only real problem with *From Hell* is that there's such a big gap between instalments it's easy to forget which of the (often very similar looking) minor characters are which – that, and the fact that it's just not as exciting as things like *Watchmen* used to be. It's a shame, but it seems that – even in comics – thrills and serious intent make uncomfortable bedfellows. Don't get me wrong, though, it's still good stuff – and who knows? Maybe one day he'll return to combining the two sides of his work and start doing serious adventure stories again. We can but hope...

Flashy Tony Daniel/Kevin Conrad art from *Spawn: Blood Feud*, the first of a new batch of lightweight superhero works from Alan Moore.

Dr William Gull, Queen Victoria's surgeon, and a popular choice for the real Jack the Ripper, gets a grisly realisation in *From Hell*.



Two sides of the same coin, needs must, Jekyll & Hyde, etc.

Rian Hughes

The month in COMICS

New comics from the DC stable, coming soon, plus the Forbidden Planet charts.

Goddess

DC/Vertigo

Writer: **Garth Ennis**
Artists: **Phil Winslade**
Issue: **1-3**
Price: **£1.85**
Text: **Matt Bielby**

We've said it before, but we'll say it again: Irishman Garth Ennis has developed into the best writer currently working in regular monthly comics.

More entertaining than Grant Morrison, more original than Alan Grant, more reliable than Pete Milligan or Pat Mills, and miles ahead of Neil Gaiman, his newish *Preacher* title is the best over-the-top, Tarantinoesque "road comic" ever published.

His soon-to-be-released *Hitman* promises much too, but in the meantime, he's treating us to *Goddess*, an ecological adventure mini-series, filled with very black humour. This story of an ordinary Irish girl suddenly empowered with incredible superhuman abilities, and on the run from the CIA, is filled with OTT violence, illustrated in painstaking detail by Phil Winslade, and is easily one of the best reads currently on the comic racks. Highly recommended.

A-

Highly detailed work from newcomer Winslade...

Hellblazer

DC/Vertigo

Writer: **Paul Jenkins**
Artists: **Sean Phillips**
Issue: **92**
Price: **£1.45**
Text: **Matt Bielby**

Fears of disaster besetting this title since Ennis' departure seem unfounded with this, the first major storyline by the (to me, anyway) unknown new writer Paul Jenkins.

In the first episode of a five-part story, John Constantine – the cool, dangerous-to-know, magician-cum-chancer hero of *Hellblazer*, forever giving the finger to the devil, and telling angels where to get off – appears to be getting himself into hot water again, this time with a minor demon and the First of the Fallen. Much trouble will doubtless ensue. A good start from Jenkins, then, while Sean Phillips' art continues to impress – loose, moody, and apparently (very unusual, this) drawn straight on the page in ink, with no underlying pencils, it fits the good-looking-guy-gone-to-seed Constantine to a tee. Well worth keeping an eye on.

B+

...meets the sketchy, atmospheric art of Sean Phillips.

Coming soon

The Sandman — **August**
The three-part "The Wake" is the last major storyline for Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*, the most successful "alternative" comic, well, ever. Lovely pencil art from Michael Zulli, but this is a bit of a late stage for new readers to get involved, the comic ending, as it will, within months...

Preacher — **July**
"Naked City" – the first major storyline starts for what may, in the wake of *Sandman*, become Vertigo's most popular title – begins. It's set in New York, where our heroes are hunting down the missing, well, God...

WildC.A.T.S. — **July**
Comics legend Alan Moore starts – almost unbelievable, this – as regular writer on this fairly average *X-Men* readalike. The creative team's been completely revamped, and Travis Charest is responsible for the slick artwork...

Best-selling Comics

X-cessive!

A predictably *X-Men*-orientated chart this month – it appears the appeal of the mutant titles remains undiminished – and with *Excalibur* (the British X-title) and the latest instalment of the *Spiderman* clone saga filling out the Top 10, it must be smiles all round at Marvel. It's nice seeing a couple of titles reviewed this issue – the latest creative team's version of *Hellblazer*, and the pacey *Spawn: Blood Feud* – making an appearance, though.

The Forbidden Planet Comic Chart

1 **Uncanny X-Men** #323 Marvel
2 **Gen-X** #6 Marvel
3 **X-Men** #5 Marvel
4 **X-Factor** #113 Marvel
5 **Superman Vs Aliens** #2 Dark Horse
6 **Spawn: Blood Feud** #1 Image
7 **Sandman** #70 DC
8 **Spiderman Max Cloneage Alpha** #1 Marvel
9 **Hellblazer** #92 DC
10 **Excalibur** # 88 Marvel

30 DAYS INTO THE FUTURE...

Coming next month in SFX

The X-Files

We held out as long as we could, but it had to happen eventually... Join us next month as *X-Files* fever hits SFX. You've never seen a behind-the-scenes look at a TV show like this before – including an interview with its creator Chris Carter, a chat with some of the scriptwriters about writing for the show, and maybe (just maybe) a talk with David "sex god" Duchovny himself...

40 years of BBC visual effects

To celebrate four decades of BBC visual effects, we take an affectionate look behind the scenes, and chat with some of the department's leading lights, including Matt Irvine, Mike Tucker and Jim Francis. If you ever loved *Doctor Who*, *Blake's 7*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* or (gulp!) *Captain Zep – Space Detective* you can't afford to miss this...

Plus!

Christopher Priest talks about his new novel, *The Prestige*, and loads more...

SFX4: ON SALE TUESDAY 22 AUGUST. ORDER IT!

TOSH Reviews

"Picard and gem come across as poor shadows of another tale involving a hobbit and a ring, and while the story picks up after a slow start, it ends too quickly and with not much of a fanfare."

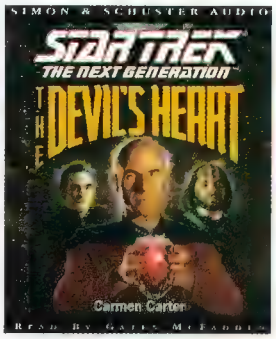
TREK TALK

Dr Crusher narrates this derivative tale...

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION: THE DEVIL'S HEART

Author: **Carmen Carter**
Publisher: **Simon & Schuster Audio**
Price: **£7.99**
Running time: **180 minutes**
ISBN: **0-671-85614-6**

Text: **Nick Peters**



***The Devil's Heart*, Carmen Carter's third *Star Trek: The Next Generation* novel gets an earnest reading from Gates (Crusher) McFadden – and utterly fails to grab the listener's attention. The fault lies not with McFadden's atmospheric reading, but the nature of the story itself, which has no clear focus, shifts uneasily between past and present, and gives none of the characters the space or attention they deserve.**

The story follows the effects of a gemstone as it passes through numerous *Star Trek* cultures, en route, making its keepers so jealously possessive that bloodshed and destruction are never far away. With Picard as its latest owner, the scene is set for a tense confrontation between captain and crew. But despite frequent reference to his determination to keep it in his possession, Picard fails to provide any real threat.

Consequently, Captain and gem come across as poor shadows of another tale involving a hobbit and a ring. And while the story picks up after a slow start, it ends with almost indecent speed and not much of a fanfare, leaving the listener bewildered as to what he or she may have missed. McFadden does her best, but the fact she delivers her own lines as Crusher less convincingly than anyone else's surely speaks volumes for her perception of what is, overall, a disjointed story with no real direction.

C

STAR TREK SPACE TALK SERIES FIGURES

Manufacturer:
Bandai/Playmates
Publisher: **Paper Tiger**
Price: **£12.99 each**

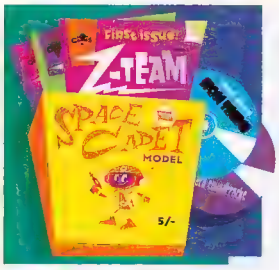
Text: **MJ Simpson**

In a world replete with 6-inch figures based on every film and series going, Bandai has, at long last, decided to go for something a little different: 7-inch talking figures!

There are four to choose from in this new range – the novelty being that each one character has three different things to say every time you press a cunningly concealed button at the back: "Engage!", "Damage report," and "Captain's Log supplemental..." commands Picard, for instance. Conversely, the Borg asserts that "Freedom is irrelevant," "You must comply" or "We are the Borg." Riker, being a toy of few words, barks out "Energise! Shields up! Red Alert!" whereas Q merely muses "Humans... What a pity", "Bonjour, mon capitan" and "Mama, I love you."

These are really for kiddies (aged 4 and up) or completists with 52 quid to spare (or compo winners – we've got a free set to give away this month – see opposite). The figures aren't *that* accurate – Picard looks like the Hood from *Thunderbirds*, for instance, but each one comes with a couple of tiny plastic props – easy to lose/swallow – and a "Space Talk Adventure Booklet."

C+



The month in TOSH

WHERE ELSE CAN WE PUT THIS STUFF, EH?

DIRK

The place: **Old Fire Station, Theatre, Oxford**
The time: **30 May-3 June 1995**
The event: **Dirk Gently: the stage play!**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

After innumerable stage versions of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, this is the first adaptation of Douglas Adams' non-Hitchhiker novel, *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*.

A reworking of his unfinished *Doctor Who* story "Shada" (with shades of "City of Death"), the original novel had some good bits, but didn't make a lot of sense and isn't one of Adams' best works. In the stageplay,

though, James Goss and Arvind David have trimmed the story down to its bare bones and replaced a lot of Adams' florid text with hip references to films and TV, including *Reservoir Dogs, The Blues Brothers, Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)* and even *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* itself.

Bizarrely, the Electric Monk has been excised, but his horse (which appeared – off-stage – in a bathroom) was still included. The ending betrayed the story's typically-crap-late-'70s-*Doctor-Who* origins by making no sense, and relying on a sudden idea couched in technobabble, but there was little anyone could do about it.

The performances, however, were all good, especially Mark Chamberlain as the weary Police Sergeant Gilks and Gregory Norminton as Michael Wenton-Weakes, whose possession by an alien was a masterpiece of unblinking bug-eyedness. The multi-purpose, multi-level set was imaginatively designed too, and the props and costumes mostly excellent (although the albatross looked a tad dodgy). But what really made the show were the high-quality projected computer graphics, starting with a parody of *Star Trek: Generations* and finishing with Zebedee's "time for bed" reminder.

Dirk was as fine a piece of science fiction theatre as you are likely to find anywhere. It may be revived at this year's Edinburgh Festival, and possibly at Worldcon, in which case you're strongly advised to check it out.

A-

Rian Hughes

JUDGE DREDD PHONECARDS

Distributor: **P&J Promotions, Dept 20, PO Box 23, Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex, BN43 5EG**
Price: **£10 per card**
Release: **First cards out now**
Text: **Dave Golder**

Would you pay a tenner for something that's essentially worth just 50p, maybe 60p at a push, if you include the card it's stuck to? It certainly sounds like the king of all rip-offs, but – believe it or not – when it comes to these *Judge Dredd* phonecards, it's actually a sound investment.

They're being released approximately every month over the next couple of years, and the complete set of 18 will form a story especially commissioned from John Wagner, Dredd's creator, and artist Kev Walker, who's worked for *2000AD* and as technical art advisor on the *Dredd* film.

More importantly, they're a strictly limited edition set, with only 2,000 of each being produced. So if you get the whole series, you're going to have one seriously hot collector's item on your hands. And they look dead smart too.

B+

WIN! WIN! WIN!

T-SHIRTS, VIDEOS, DREDD & TREK GOODIES

YOUR CHANCE TO WIN SCI-FI/FANTASY MATERIAL FOR MERELY KNOWING GUY GAVRIEL KAY'S INSIDE LEG MEASUREMENT, OR QUOTING THE VERY LAST LINE OF DIALOGUE FROM FORBIDDEN PLANET. POSSIBLY.

King-Size Bed Compo

If you like to read in bed then you need three things: A T-shirt to wear; a pillow case to put your pillow in; and something to read, preferably with a really apposite title like *Insomnia*. Stephen King's aptly-titled new novel is only being made available in a mondo-exclusive limited edition of 2,000, but we've managed to nab one for ourselves – and now we're giving it away!

One lucky SFX reader will stroll away with a limited edition copy of the book, plus an *Insomnia* promotional pillowcase – we're not making this up! – and *Insomnia* T-shirt, all courtesy of those fine folk at NEL. Ten runners-up will get an ordinary paperback copy of Mr King's opus, plus pillow-case and T-shirt.

To stand a chance of winning, just tell us the pseudonym under which Stephen King wrote *The Running Man*.

Mark your entry King-Size Bed Compo.

Do Not Go Gently Into That Dark Knight Compo

Val Kilmer; is he as good as Michael Keaton? Joel Schumacher; how does he compare with Tim Burton? You can find out with a little help from Warner Home Video, which has conveniently released Widescreen versions of both *Batman* and *Batman Returns*, replete with respective trailers. Three lucky readers can win both these tapes, plus a copy of the newly-released Doug McClure classic *At the Earth's Core*. To win the set, just tell us who was going to play Catwoman but couldn't because she was pregnant?

Mark your entry Do Not Go Gently Into That Dark Knight Compo.

Impractically Large Shoulder-Pads Compo

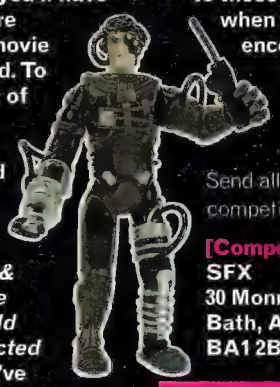
Unless you've been living up a particularly tall tree, you'll have noticed that people are talking about a new movie based on Judge Dredd. To tie in with the release of the film, the good citizens at Titan Books have published four new collections of *2000AD* stories: ***Classic Judge Dredd, Judge Dredd & The Angel Gang, The Complete Judge Child Quest*** and ***The Collected Judge Anderson***. We've got five sets of the aforementioned books to give away – to win one simply tell us Judge Anderson's first name.

Mark your entry Impractically Large Shoulder-Pads Compo.

Resistance Is Futile Compo

The Next Generation – you've seen the TV series, now get Bandai's four talking figures! We've got ten sets to give away to those who can tell us when the Enterprise first encountered the Borg?

Mark your entry Resistance Is Futile Compo.



Send all your competition entries to:

[Compo name]
SFX
30 Monmouth Street
Bath, Avon
BA1 2BW

Those rules and regulations in full

All entries should come on the back of a p... each competition you...

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Tuesday 21 September.

AND THE WINNERS FROM SFX1 ARE...

Japanese Toon-Babes Compo
Katsuhiro Otomo (or Otomo Katsuniro) directed *Akira*. *Macross Plus* vids volumes 1 and 2 (courtesy of Manga Video) to: Daniel Doyle, Huddersfield; Rob Symes, Portsmouth; Andrew Kyle, Highlands; John Bakes, Clwyd; Frank Johnston, Orkney; Julie Atkin, Crawley; Graham Anderson, Glasgow; Martin Leggett, Merseyside; Daniel Moss, Newcastle Upon Tyne; Anthony Carpendale, Harrogate.

Wild Scotsman Compo
Iain Banks' first published novel was *The Wasp Factory*. A complete Banksie library (courtesy of Abacus and Orbit) goes to: Bruce Hayles, Hants

Genetically Engineered Kangaroo Compo
Lori Petty's last film before *Tank Girl* was *Free Willy* (and not *Point Break*, as most of you thought). The Making of Tank Girl books (courtesy of Titan) to: Mr AR Hasley, Barking; Jack Greenslade, Chesnunt; Hillary Stephen, Northampton; Philip West, Birmingham; Marcus E Martin, Nottingham; Lisa Maguire, Dunstable; Damon Smith, Watford; Jake Harvey, Roxburghshire; Martin Clabburn, Stevenage; Geoff Leone, Arbroath; Chris Tregenza, Nottingham; Jonathan Eyers, Southend; Ian Wilkinson, Hove; Leigh Milne, Lanark; Mark Sweeney, Dublin; S E Iacott, Okehampton; W Chisnall, Telford; J Mascall, Telford; Mr Hotchkiss, Telford, Chig, Telford.

Mysteriously Absent Time Lord Compo
Lalla Ward played Romana after her regeneration. 'Key To Time' videos and posters (courtesy of BBC Video) to: Mark Taylor, Bristol; M Bhai, Hounslow; Jerry O' Toole, Upminster.

Cool Computer Animation Compo
Steve Barron directed *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. *Reboot* videos (courtesy of Polygram) to: Philip West, Birmingham; Julie Atkin, Crawley; L McGrath, Oldham; James Lamb, Grantham; P Foreman, Enfield; Marcus Morgan, Surrey; Jake Harvey, Roxburghshire; Richard Smethurst, Stourport; Donald Ridley, Poole; Mr Colin Duncan, Fife

Phil Atterly Compo
HG Wells' initials stood for (b) Herbert George. SF stamp presentation packs and T-shirts (courtesy of the Post Office) to: Simon Hancox, Staffs; Nigel Brown, Bridgend; Ian Whitfield, Hinckley; Mr Gary Dean Beaven, Nottingham; Phil Senior, Thornton; Alan Maxwell, Dunfermline; GR Miller, Hamilton; Miss S Lassett, Ashford; John Porter, Leicester; Stephen A Graham, Carlisle; Russell Mills, Hornchurch; Hillary Stephen, Northampton; Steve Tetchner, Westcliff on Sea; Matthew Roberts, Cardiff; Donald J Makin, Dunfermline; Liam McGrath, Oldham; Brian Wells, Sheffield; WJ Colins, Willenhall; Teckwyn Lim, Gwynedd; Francis Moloney, Gloucester; Chris Williams, Colchester; Mr T Woolery, Rugby; Mr AR Hasley, Barking; James Lamb, Grantham; Mark Gardnam, Orpington.

Presentation packs only to: Trevor Wells, Nottingham; Nigel Parsons, Cardiff; K Rhodes, Leeds; Kathy Parrott, Milton Keynes; Kevin Patton, Norfolk; Ms J Mitchell, Bridgwater; Amanda Hone, Barmouth; David Williams, Carmarthen; Paul Malone, Mansfield; David Marris, Wigton; Miss PA Allaritt, Wolverhampton; Lloyd Ellis, Taunton; David Jackson, London; Gary Wright, Deeside; S Bhandal, Birmingham; Andrew Kenny, Crewe; Julie Arne, Barking; B Thackray, Croydon; Charlie Cook, Alderley Edge; A-M Cosgrove, Woodstock; Phil Metcalfe, Stroud; Ms M Varney, Nottingham; Mr James Rodgers, Wetherby; Jon Gill, Dundee; Geoff Leone, Arbroath.

SOL III

Norbreck Castle Hotel, Blackpool, 26-29 May 1995

Klingons, Vulcans, Bajorans, Vorlons, Ferengi – and even a few humans – made it to this year's Spring Bank Holiday Star Trek extravaganza. Plus one lone Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy obsessive, **MJ Simpson**...

The annual Spring Bank Holiday *Star Trek* bash was held this year in Blackpool, in a huge hotel-conference centre which has already hosted several large cons, including at least one Eastercon. About 1,300 people attended, including a number of first-timers, their curiosity piqued by local radio coverage.

Sol III offered plenty of opportunities for people to get involved, from costuming to karaoke, with parties, a large dealer's room – and, of course, a bar (epicentre of any good convention). A good mix of guests was headlined by two minor *TNG* guest stars, Dwight Schultz (Barclay) and Eric Menyuk (The Traveller), along with author Harry Harrison and ubiquitous *Star Trek* expert Richard Arnold.

Costumes are an integral part of a *Trek* con, and one rapidly becomes used to the huge numbers of highly accurate Star Fleet uniforms being worn around the hotel. Among the various Klingons, Bajorans, Vulcans, Vorlons and Ferengi – and even humans – present were several *Babylon 5* characters, including a stunning Ambassador Kosh! A couple of *Space Precinct* aliens also made an appearance, as well as a pair of Mulder and Scully lookalikes – constantly trailed by a group of dark-suited heavies from the USAF!

Although the con's "tech ops" were professionally handled, there were a few organisational blunders – notably the special effects demonstration by *Space Precinct* fx supervisor Alan Whibley, which was spoilt by microphone problems. The closing ceremony also dragged on interminably. Still, these are tiny quibbles, given that Sol III was organised entirely by volunteers.

Admittedly, the programme of events could have been more adventurous, but the atmosphere was a happy one all the same. *Star Trek* fandom eliminates all barriers, and promotes co-operation, tolerance and fun.

Eric Menyuk summed it up best when he said: "If all the world was a *Star Trek* convention, it would be a much better place to live."

Ambassador Kosh unmasked! Paul Curtis in his stunning, home-made Vorlon costume.

"If all the world was a *Star Trek* convention, it would be a much better place to live"

Eric Menyuk, The Traveller

Tuns to see and do

You could bump into some famous people at The Tun. **MJ Simpson** pours himself a pint and takes in the atmosphere.

Just across the road from London's Waterloo station is a pub called The Wellington. And on the first Thursday of each month, it fills up with science fiction fans eager to discuss SF, pick up fannish gossip, socialise, and – of course – drink until closing time.

This meeting is affectionately known as "The Tun," after its original site, a pub called The One Tun. Since moving to the Wellington, it's now also become known as "The Welly." But the name is immaterial – it's the people that count. Everybody who's anybody in British science fiction has visited "The Tun" at some time or other over the years, including such notables as Arthur C Clarke.

Organisers of fan groups and conventions are always in attendance, and you'll often catch eager fanzine editors distributing their wares. The man shoving a copy of a one-sheet called *Ansible* into your hand, for example, is our own Dave Langford.

There's no formal structure to "The Tun," no admission fees, not even a separate room. It's just a monthly get-together for anybody who wants to turn up, which fills the pub and guarantees a good night out.

So next time you're in London on the first Thursday of the month, pop into the Wellington (5pm onwards) and take the opportunity to meet some of the movers and shakers in British SF fandom.

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FANTASTIC DAYS

Dates for your diary

Welcome back to SFX's monthly updated conventions listing. All conventions listed here are non-profit-making events organised by fans, unless otherwise stated. Price quoted is full weekend registration at time of going to press, but this may rise nearer the con. One- or two-day registrations may also be available. Always enclose an SAE with enquiries. Con organisers, if your con is not here or your entry is incorrect or incomplete, send further details to Live!, SFX, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, Avon BA1 2BW.

29 July 1995
Brand-X
X-Files minicon at Mountbatten Hotel, Leicester Square, London. Registration £9. Write to: **338 Blackfen Road, Sidcup, Kent DA15 9NY.**

29 July 1995
Klingon Festival
Local group USS Pegasus organise *Trek*-esque activities at The Clansman, Hartlepool Shopping Centre. Registration £8. Write to: **Mr & Mrs A Doyle, 115 Macaulay Road, Hartlepool, Cleveland TS25 4NF.**

11-13 August 1995
Nexus 95
Bristol Star Fleet Registry and Bristol Astronomical Society present a *Star Trek*/SF con at the Holiday Inn Crown Plaza, Bristol. Guests: John de Lancie, Jon Pertwee, Chas Evans & Steve Parkinson. Registration £35. Write to: **26 Milner Road, Horfield, Bristol.**

24-28 August 1995
Intersection
53rd World SF Convention at the SECC, Glasgow. 5,000 attendees, 200 authors, 400 program events. Guests: Samuel R Delaney, Gerry Anderson, Les Edwards, Ving Clark, Peter Morwood, Diane Duane. Postal registrations are now closed. On-door registrations range from £20 (Thursday or Monday) to £100 (all five days). Miss it at your peril.

1-3 September 1995
Lightspeed '95
Star Trek con at the Hilton International Hotel, Leeds. Guests: Robert O'Reilly, Dennis Ashton. Write to: **16 Bramwell Street, Eastwood, Rotherham, South Yorks S65 1RZ.**

2-3 September 1995
Ne'a'driar
Star Trek con, in association with West Middlesex *Star Trek* Group, at the Shepperton Moat House. Guest: Guy Vardaman. Write to: **John Foxley, 143 Northumberland Road, North Harrow, Middlesex HA2 7RB.**

15-18 September 1995
Wolf 359 – The Gathering
Star Trek/*Babylon 5* con at the Sachas Hotel, Manchester. Guests include Majel Barrett-Roddenberry, Michael O'Hare, Mira Furlen, JM Straczynski, George Marshall, & Tim Gaskill. Registration £35. Write to: **Margo White, 37 Branksome Road, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS2 4HG.**

22-24 September 1995
6th Festival Of Fantastic Films
Society of Fantastic Films presents Manchester's annual filmfest, with special guest Roger Corman. Write to: **95 Meadowgate Road, Salford, Manchester M6 8EN.**

6-8 October 1995
Midcon 14
Star Trek convention held at the Holiday Inn Hotel, Leicester. Registration £33. Write to: **8 Ennerdale Close, Oadby, Leicester LE2 4TN.**

14-15 October 1995
Octocon 95
Irish national con at the Royal Marine Hotel, Dun Laoghaire. Usual huge guest list includes Mary Gentle, Robert Holdstock, Kim Newman, James White, Anne McCaffrey, Katherine Kurtz, Michael Scott, etc. Registration £16 until 1/9/95. IRC to: **30 South Circular Road, Dublin 8, Ireland or e-mail mmmchugh@tcd.ie**

27-29 October 1995
Phoenix
Star Trek/media con at the Apollo Hotel, Birmingham. Guests include Dave Prowse, Jeremy Bulloch & SFX's own Jim Swallow. Write to: **112 The Normans, Wexham, Slough SL2 5TU.**

27-30 October 1995
Cult TV
Telefantasy weekend at the Haven All-Action Centre, Caister, Great Yarmouth. Guests include Chris Carter, Brian Clemens and Kenneth Cope, plus more videos than you can imagine! Registration £39 until 31/7/95. Write to: **PO Box 1701, Peterborough PE1 1EX.**

28 October 1995
As part of Peterborough Museum's space exploration exhibition (24 Oct-18 Nov), Peterborough SF club is organising a talk by authors Stephen Baxter, Keith Brooke and Peter F Hamilton. For more info, write to: **Peterborough Museum, Priestgate, Peterborough.**

3-5 November 1995
Novacon 25
Annual SF con celebrates its silver jubilee at the Chamberlain Hotel, Birmingham. Guests are Brian W Aldiss, Iain Banks, Harry Harrison and Bob Shaw, but many more authors usually attend. Write to: **Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY9 8SS.**

3-5 November 1995
ReContainmeTed
Con for fans of Japanese anime at the Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow. Registration £21 until 30/9/95. Write to: **Martin Pay, 29 Langton Avenue, Chelmsford CM1 2BW.**

17-19 November 1995
Armadacon VII
Multi-media SF & fantasy con at the Astor Hotel, Plymouth, with guests John Brunner and John Carrigan. Registration £20. Write to: **4 Gleneagle Avenue, Mannamead, Plymouth, Devon PL3 5HL.**

18-19 November 1995
Assimilation
Star Trek/media con at the Friendly Hotel, Milton Keynes. Guests are Jon Pertwee, Nicholas Courtney, George Marshall & Terry Shuttleworth. Registration £20. Write to: **Stuart Banks, 77 Holyrood Avenue, South Harrow, Middlesex HA2 8UD.**

2-4 February 1996
Starbase 96
Star Trek at the Hilton National Hotel, Leeds. Registration £40. Write to: **Miss Carol Looby, 152 Otley Rd, Headingly, Leeds LS16 5JX.**

10-11 February 1996
Star Fleet Ball
Star Trek bash at the Royal Bath Hotel, Bournemouth, in association with local group USS Excalibur. Registration £35. Write to: **Anne Lindup, "Five Elms," Holtwood, Nr Wimborne, Dorset BH21 7DT. (NB: SF dress compulsory!)**

29-31 March 1996
48 Hours in Space
48-hour TVSF marathon at the Comfort Friendly Inn, Hull, in association with Hull Starfleet. Registration £25. Write to: **Hull Starfleet, PO Box 1701, Hull HU4 7YU.**

5-8 April 1996
Evolution
47th British National SF Convention (Eastercon) is at the Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow. Guests are Verror Vinge, Colin Greenland, Bryan Talbot, Jack Cohen, Maureen Speller and Paul Kincaid. Registration £24. Write to: **13 Lindfield Gardens, Hamstead, London NW3 6PX or e-mail bmh@ee.ic.ac.uk**

12-14 April 1996
Accelerate 96
UK's first weekend-long *Quantum Leap* convention at the ever-popular Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow. Write to: **78 Sterry Rd, Dagenham, Essex RM10 8NT or e-mail Accelerate@pbayliss.demon.co.uk**

2-6 May 1996
Warp Two
41st British *Star Trek* Convention is at the Cardiff International Arena. Guests are Walter Koenig, Mark Lenard, Richard Arnold. Registration is £35. Write to: **David Simons, Warp Two, 69 Merlin Crescent, Edgeware, Middlesex HA8 6JB.**

24-27 May 1996
Inconsequential V Inconsistent
Third (sic) SF humour con at the Scotch Corner Hotel, Darlington. Registration is £22. Write to: **Flat 1, 31 Saxon Road, South Norwood, London SE25 5EQ.**

23-26 August 1996
Concorde
42nd British *Star Trek* Convention is at – yes! – the Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow. Registration is £30 until 31/12/95. Write to: **Concorde Registrations,138 Crosslands, Stantonbury, Milton Keynes MK14 6DF.**

28-31 March 1997
Intervention
It's not too early to register for the '97 Eastercon, at the low rate of £20. Brian Aldiss, Robert Silverberg and SFX's own David Langford are the guests. Further details from: **12 Crowsbury Close, Emsworth, Hants PO10 7TS.**

SFX

The Science Fiction Magazine

#3 August 1995

Contact us at:

SFX, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, Avon BA1 2BW ☎ (01225) 442244 Fax (01225) 446019 sfx@futurenet.co.uk

Who we are and what we do:

Editor	**Matt Bielby mattb@futurenet.co.uk**
Deputy Editor	**Dave Golder sfx@futurenet.co.uk**
Staff Writer	**MJ Simpson**
Production Editor	**Dan Goodleff**
Art Editor	**Lisa Nicholls**
Additional Design	**Richard Hood**
Photography	**Rick Buetter, Noel Collyer, Rob Scott, Craig Stennett, Fred Prouser**
Space Cadet Illustration	**Rian Hughes**
Cover	**Jim Carrey as The Riddler from *Batman Forever***
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Publicity Manager	**Liz Ramsay ☎ (0171) 331 3920**
Product Manager	**Tamara Ward**
Circulation Manager	**Jon Bickley**
Publisher	**Greg Ingham**
Assistant Publisher	**Alison Morton**
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Contributors: Jon Abbott, Dan Abnett, Andrew Adams, Simon Bisson, Hillary Broadribb, Andy Butcher, Stuart Campbell, Paul Cornell, Jonathan Davies, James Duggan, Maff Evans, Nigel Floyd, Simon Forrester, John Gosling, John Grant, Stuart Green, Steve Holland, Liz Holliday, Chris Hulme, Steve Jarratt, Jane Killick, Andy Lane, David Langford, Karen Levell, Neil MacIntosh, Zy Nicholson, Tim Norris, Nick Peers, Mike Reccia, John Campbell Rees, Adrian Rigelsford, Cavan Scott, Jon Smith, Maureen Speller, Jim Swallow, Gary Whitta

Subscriptions
Future Publishing Ltd
FREEPOST BS4900 Somerton,
Somerset TA11 7BR

Customer Services ☎ (01225) 822510
Customer Order Line: ☎ (01225) 822511; Fax (01458) 274378

The subscription rate for 14 issues is:
UK £36, post free; Europe £63, rest of world £92

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Printed in the UK.
A member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations.

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Did you know...

SFX's official "beer" of the month: Hooch
SFX 3 was put together to the sound of: Dan's dance rubbish (unfortunately).

THE TRIPODS

THE SEA OF TIME PARTS ONCE MORE AND, LIKE MOSES, WE STRIDE BETWEEN WALLS OF WATER TO FIND OURSELVES STEPPING OUT INTO... A SATURDAY TEA-TIME IN THE MID-'80S?

Right: Behind you! Here's the finished effect from the show – giant leg suggests a massive war machine, just above and behind the girl, while a groping arm reaches down towards her.

Top: But here's the truth about that arm – it's being manipulated by a couple of blokes standing on a fire engine-style crane.

Above: And those legs actually extend only a couple of feet beyond the top of your TV picture. Picnicking crew members look less than terrified...

A BBC Production, in association with The Seven Network, Australia (1984-85)
Producer: **Richard Bates**
Adapted by: **Alick Rowe** and **Christopher Penfold** from the novels by **John Christopher**
Visual effects: **Steve Bowman, Simon Tayler, Steve Drewett, Kevin Molloy, Michael Kelt**.

This series of shots from *The Tripods* – the £1 million family science fiction serial, based on John Christopher's trio of novels about a world reduced to neo-medievalism in the aftermath of an alien invasion – shows how the alien intruders themselves were realised. Crucial to the show, their failure to reveal themselves much during the first batch of 13 episodes is often reckoned to be directly responsible for low ratings and *The Tripods'* eventual cancellation. The machines themselves were represented by scale models in the long shots, and these full-scale props in close-up. Unsurprisingly, the metal legs only rise up far enough to disappear off the top of your TV screen, while the probing tentacles were – yes! – moved by a bloke on a crane.

The second season storyline was more action-packed, with the show's young hero Will Parker (John Shackley) attempting to get inside the aliens' city and learn some of their secrets. Unfortunately, despite the added excitement this afforded, Michael Grade – then controller of BBC 1 – hated the show and had it cancelled, sadly before the proposed third season could round off the story. Fans who wanted to know what happened would thus just have to read the books instead...

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TRAILERS IN

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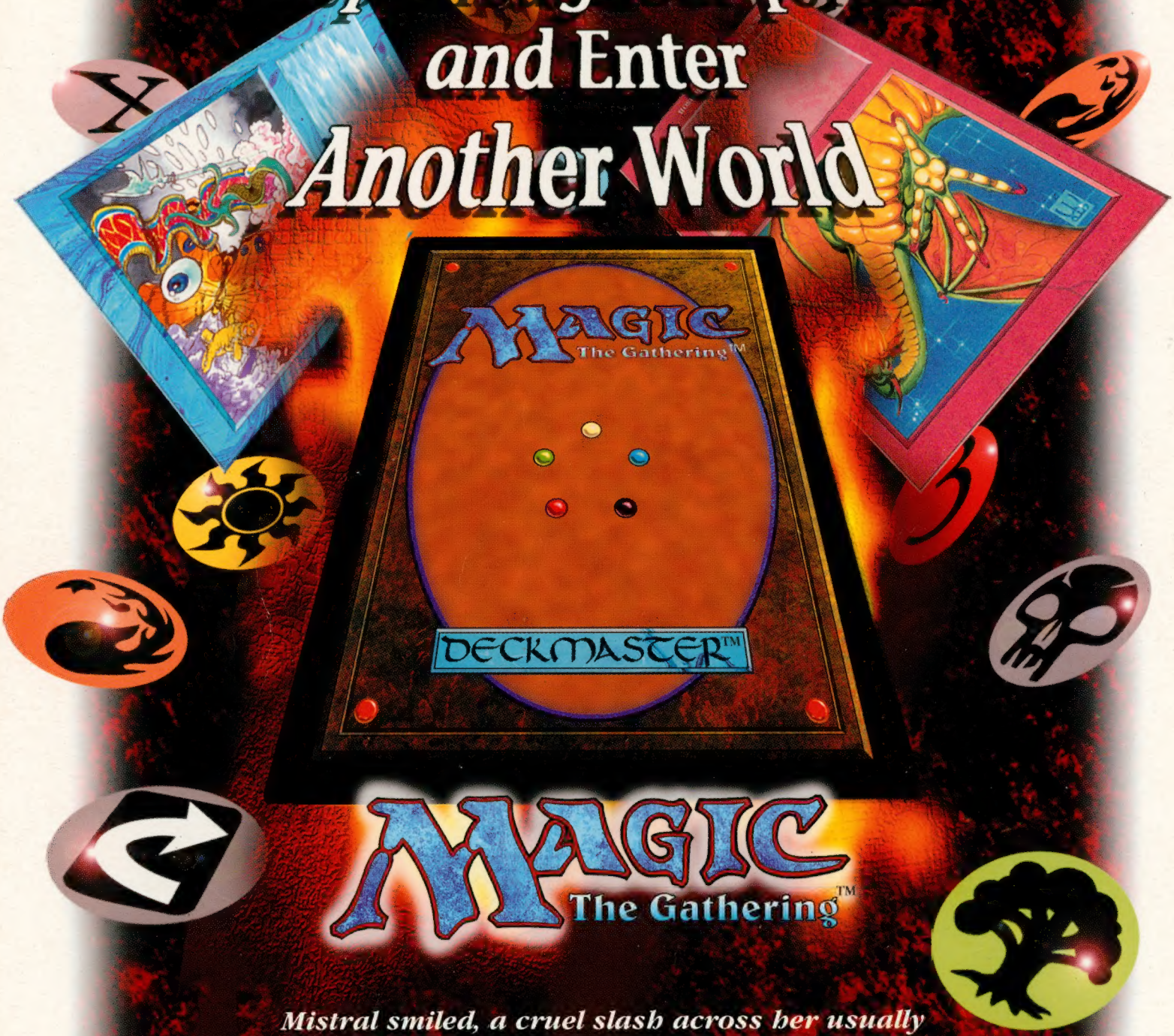

MAGIC The Gathering™

Mistral smiled, a cruel slash across her usually delicate face. The black stone - Jet - around her neck seemed to almost glint in the murk of the swamp. This game would be fun...

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